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BRIDGET

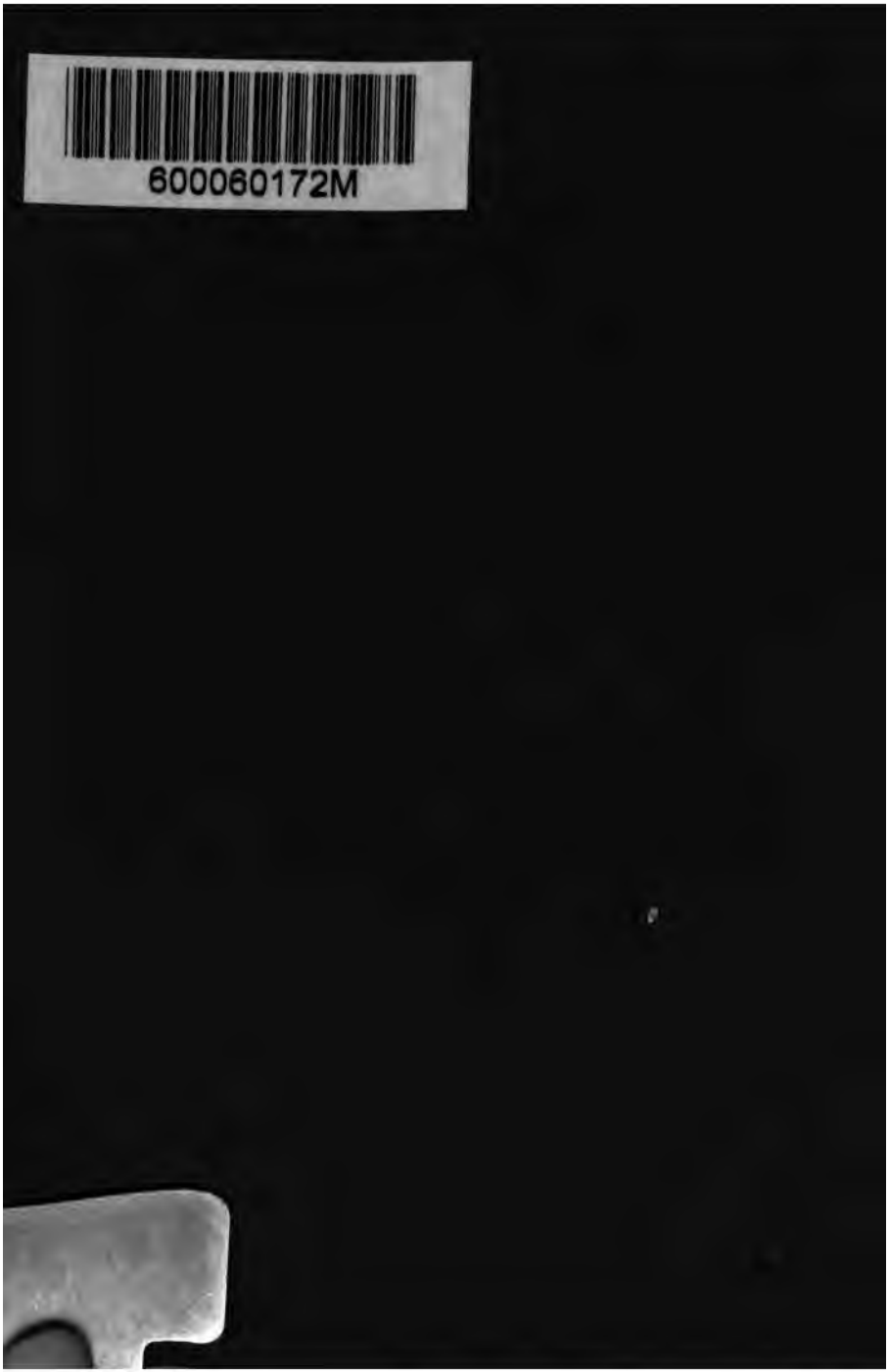
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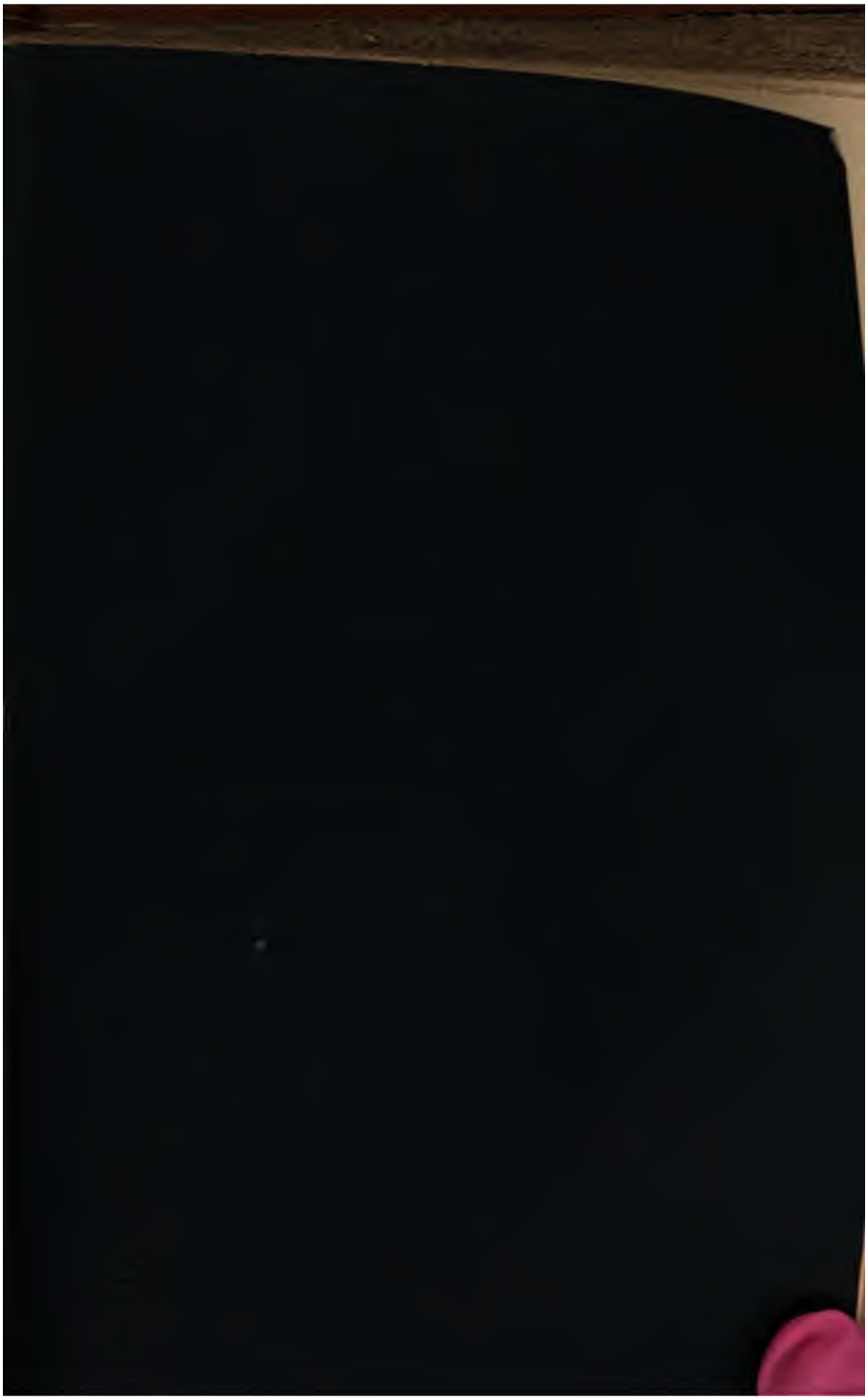
THE AUTHOR OF

"KITTY"


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BRIDGET.

VOL. I.

BRIDGET.

BY

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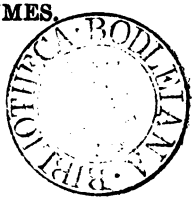
AUTHOR OF

"KITTY," "DOCTOR JACOB," "FELICIA,"
"A WINTER WITH THE SWALLOWS,"
&c., &c.

"Aux plus desherités, le plus d'amour."
Guépin, of Nantes.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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BRIDGET.

CHAPTER I.

FOUR AND THREE MAKE SEVEN!

IT was a delicious evening in August. The dreamy purple skies were cloudless, hardly a breeze stirred the stately lilies of suburban gardens, and all the wide green landscape lying around Highgate Hill was bathed in mellow light. Far off the dome of St. Paul's rose grandly amid a thousand spires, the city stretching on either side, dim, vast, mysterious. All was still except for the twittering of birds in

wayside-hedges, the cries of happy children out at play, and the boom of perpetual trains speeding across the scene. On such a night there are leisurely pedestrians, not only on the wooded heights of Highgate, but among the rural lanes of Hornsey, the fields and meadows of Wood Green, and the winding banks of the New River. Popular, too, is the walk over One Tree Hill, and pleasant the prospect it affords of smiling valleys and spacious parks, of many a clustering village and tapering spire on one side, and the great awful shadow of London on the other. No fairer suburbs are to be found than there, which even the nightingale haunts still, and which, in spite of railways and of other innovations, have remained rustic, quiet, and old-fashioned. Wild flowers grow abundantly around newly-built streets, barn-door fowls cackle close to brand-new railway-taverns; and the

yearly spectacle of hay-making and corn-cutting delights the eyes of town-bred children. Alike in winter and in summer, there are natural beauties and charms to be found in these unfashionable northern suburbs of London.

Among the ramblers now returning to their homes in the starry, dewy twilight, were a city clerk and his young wife, who slowly descended the green slopes of Muswell Hill, leading to Hornsey Rise.

"I can hardly believe it is true," began the wife, after a long pause before a meadow-stile. "We have waited for it so long, and it has come at last!—the life you have coveted, and, I am sure, deserved."

"I don't know what my deserts may be, but I know what I have dreamed of night and day, asleep and awake," replied the husband with a trembling eagerness in his voice. "It—it is not life, indeed, it is slavery

to plod on day after day, year after year, in a counting-house, without leisure, without sympathy, without inspiration. All that is best in me, except my affection, has hitherto been crushed, imprisoned, dead!"

"And now you are going to win a reputation and live among poets and artists as Helwyse does. I always said you had the most genius of the two."

"Helwyse has a lovely nature, and she has made a lovely life for herself. I am not sure that I might not outrun her, had we started fair; but she was a mere child when I began life, and ten years' advantage has given her the race."

"Helwyse is twenty-three, and you were only thirty-four last birthday. That is still young for a man. But Helwyse will always be younger, Helwyse will always be perfect, Helwyse will always be a pattern," answered the wife, half in jest, half in ear-

nest. The foolish speech was answered by a reproving smile, and then, arm-in-arm, they continued their walk, passing slowly down the dusky avenue of Crouch End.

"Surely nothing can happen to spoil our plans now!" she said, as they drew near home. "We have a little money lying in the bank. We have found just the house we want. You are promised some writing for a newspaper, and Helwyse will perhaps live with us, and help us with the rent at first. We really shall leave Hornsey Rise at Michaelmas, shall we not?"

"Oh, let us not talk of it any more! Who can tell what may happen?" answered the man; but the force of habit was too strong. They had talked of the new bright life dawning upon them incessantly for months past, and after a momentary break, returned to it now.

Like happy children prattling about toys

to be bought next day, they went on, building castles in the air, till they reached home. It was a tiny, semi-detached villa, in a newly-built, unpoetic-looking street, yet cheery and pleasant all the same. There were flowers in the front garden, with a few trees and shrubs at the back, and tall sunflowers lending majesty to the small domain. In the general sitting-room were flowers and birds and children's toys; and in the best parlour a few books, pictures, and a piano; whilst upstairs, sleeping side by side in their snowy-white beds, were three rosy, fair-haired little girls, so many small copies of their mother. She kissed them all, then went down to prepare supper. The cloth was laid, and a grateful smell of baked potatoes issued from the kitchen; but what good housewife ever allowed a salad to be prepared by a maid-of-all-

work?—or the key of the cellar to the nursemaid?—for of these two was made up the clerk's modest establishment.

Emilia was the soul of order, and if ever her husband had to find fault with her housekeeping, it was because she did it too well—that is to say, she took too much pains about it, being like Martha troubled about many things.

To-night the two sat down to their simple meal with more than usual relish. Their dreams lent a touch of romance to an existence that was otherwise monotonous and common-place. Playfellows when first at school, comrades when boy and girl, youth and maiden, Bryan and Emilia Fleming had married early, and settled down to domestic life without much love-making beforehand. They had paired like young birds in spring, the responsibilities of father and mother coming soon after, and

not a few of the cares that inevitably follow growing wants and narrow means. But at last the wife's ambition, and the husband's wishes, were on the eve of fulfilment. Each looked at the other with beaming eyes. Emilia was young and pretty still, with fair hair and piquant little nose and large blue Saxon eyes; whilst Bryan was handsome, as all Irishmen are bound to be, with the dark clustering curls, deep violet eyes, and rich complexion of his race. They seldom thought of each other's looks now; but Emilia's face would glow if anyone praised her husband's eyes; whilst Bryan denied himself many an omnibus ride to the City, and other luxuries, in order that she should have a silk dress to wear at church.

They were eating their supper with childish appetite and enjoyment, when suddenly a loud ring at the front door made

Emilia start, and Bryan drop his knife and fork. It was too late for the last postman, too late for visitors, and no one ever came at that hour. What could it be? Surely no messages of ill stepping at the eleventh hour between them and their dream! The little nursemaid had answered the summons, and hearing a confusion of voices, both master and mistress left the supper-table to see what had happened.

The front door stood wide open, and holding a candle high over her head, stood the little maid confronting with astonishment four muffled figures of various sizes, who were all speaking at once, and, as it seemed, a foreign jargon.

Bryan advanced, Emilia also, and at their appearance the tallest of the intruders sprang forward with outstretched hands and a cry of joy. It was a girl; and in the act of springing forward, her

travelling hood fell back, showing a childish face with wild dark locks hanging on her shoulders, and large, eager, brilliant black eyes. Behind her, clutching her gown timidly, followed a slender, pale-faced boy of six; whilst bringing up the rear, were two other boys, both younger than the girl, and all four having an odd, picturesque, foreign look about them.

"It is our own uncle Bryan and our aunt Emilia, is it not?" asked the girl, speaking with a strong French accent. "Our dear, dear uncle and aunt." Then all four children fell upon the two, kissing them with tears of joy. "We have come such a long, long way, and we knew you would be pleased to see us, and we had no one else to go to," she continued, "and no money either."

"It is poor Patrick's children," whis-

pered Bryan into his wife's ear; then he added aloud—"Come in, dear children, do not remain standing any longer. And you are, of course, hungry."

"Oh, so hungry!" cried the youngest boy, rubbing his face affectionately against Emilia's hand, "so hungry, auntie dear."

Emilia put the child away, not rudely or unkindly, but with a kind of instinctive terror. What did it all mean? She knew that Bryan's eldest brother, the ne'er-do-weel of the family, had died abroad in difficulties a few months ago, that they had even sent money to his orphan children, but she supposed them well cared for by their mother's relations, who were in easy circumstances. And now they were here! What did it all mean?

"Come, let us feed the poor things, and then hear their story," said Bryan, bringing out wine from the sideboard. "Quick,

Mary, and lay the table for four. There is the cold leg of mutton in the pantry and some salad still remaining. You can drink a glass of wine, boys, I'll be bound."

"No, Brigitte won't let us touch wine, but I should like some bread," answered the eldest boy, a tall lad with a kindly rather heavy face, looking eagerly towards the loaf. "We have had nothing but biscuits all day, and some apples the Captain gave us."

"Nonsense! after a journey a glass of wine will do you all the good in the world, and my poor little man here looks as pale as death," said Bryan, raising the decanter with one hand, whilst with the other he caressed the youngest child.

"Not a drop, dear uncle," cried Brigitte, springing forward, and covering the glass with her hand. "For the love of God, uncle, not a drop." Then she added pas-

sionately in his ear—"It was the ruin, the death of our father."

Bryan put back the decanter, and began cutting bread and meat cheerfully. Emilia, still in a state of painful bewilderment, made some tea. Both were too absorbed to notice the tremendous havoc soon made in the family larder by these youthful invaders. In fact, by the time the meal was over, there was literally nothing left for the morrow. Only little Hilary prattled in comic French-English as they ate.

"I am Hilaire," he said, "and my birthday is on the twenty-third of October. Brigitte is the eldest, and she is fifteen. Next comes Patrice, who was fourteen last birthday. Ambroise comes between Patrice and me, and he is eleven, Aren't you pleased to be here, Ambroise?"

To which Ambroise responded with a comic gesticulation expressive of material enjoyment only.

"But where are we to sleep, and who will lend us nightgowns?" asked little Hilaire, after achieving his last cup of tea. "I was so hungry, and now I am so sleepy!"

"Good heavens! Emmie, I never thought of that. What is to be done for beds?"

Emilia looked thunderstruck. The truth was dawning upon her by little and little. These orphan children had swooped down like so many birds of prey upon their poor little dream! All was over with their castle in the air now.

"What, indeed!" she said, with petulant dismay. "I suppose we must turn out of our room, and sleep on the sofas. The two maids can sleep together for once, and that will make one room more."

Only Brigitte noticed the speech, and the manner of it.

"Indeed, dear aunt," she said, "if Hilary

can have a comfortable bed, we three do not mind in the least where we sleep. He is so delicate."

"I have thought of a plan," put in Bryan, and beckoning his wife, they conferred together on the stairs. Emilia raised a dozen objections, saw a dozen difficulties, but the matter was settled at last, and in half an hour the four weary young travellers were sleeping profoundly, unconscious of the trouble they had brought with them.

When the supper-table was cleared, the servants had retired, and the house was once more quiet, Bryan and Emilia sat down and looked at each other in silence.

"We cannot keep them," Emilia began, half crying. "One must do one's duty to one's own children first. It would ruin us."

"Emmie, it will devolve upon you, then, to take them to the workhouse. I will not

do it as long as I have health and strength to earn them bread and shelter.

"I do not want them to be sent to the workhouse," Emilia said. "But there must be some one else, either on their father's or mother's side, to look to. They should at least have written. Bridget is not a mere child."

"You heard what she said. They had evidently neither friends nor money, and it was natural that the children should have thought of their father's brother. You know poor Patrick married a French girl without a penny, and doubtless her friends have done what they could. We shall hear all to-morrow."

"But we cannot do it," Emilia began, in the same childishly helpless, despondent way. "We have only been able to make ends meet as it is, and our children's education must not be neglected. You seem

to forget that we have three of our own, and four and three make seven."

"Well, if God had sent us seven instead of three, I must have provided for them as best I could, my dear," said Bryan, looking on the carpet, with his hands thrust in his pockets sulkily, and his locks pulled over his brow. "I can reckon as well as you. I know that four and three make seven. I did not want the children, but if I sent them to the workhouse now, I should deserve to be kicked there myself for a poltroon. That is all I can say."

"It is a sin and a shame for people to spend all they have, and leave their children beggars. Who would take in our own if we died to-morrow without providing for them?—and if we undertake this responsibility, we never shall be able to provide for them. You will never manage to

pay up your assurance. We shall have to get into debt."

"Well, there is the workhouse," Bryan said, bitterly; "but I repeat it, you shall take them there, not I."

"I do not talk of the workhouse," Emilia continued, growing more impatient. "Surely, before you sacrifice us all for these children, you will try if there is nothing else to be done. We can perhaps get the two younger boys into the Blue Coat School."

"Little Hilary looks very fit for the Blue Coat School!"

"I am sure our Margie is delicate, and she went to school long ago. If we were rich, of course we would act very differently; as it is, we can only do for them——"

"As if they were our own," Bryan said, still defiant and bitter.

Emilia burst out crying, and he went on

in the same tone, for there were moments when his wife's tears mortified, not melted him—

"Is it the fault of these poor things that they are homeless? If my brother was a bad father, was he not still my brother? Of course, it is a blow to me. We must give up our plans, we shall be straitened for years, we shall have to sacrifice our children's prospects—is it not our duty to befriend the orphans first, and think of these things afterwards? After all, perhaps I have been a presumptuous fool to think myself too good for a clerkship, and this has happened to prevent a worse disappointment."

"You must go plodding on at the office while all the time you might be winning yourself a name, like Helwyse," Emmie said, still sobbing. "That is what I grieve most about, Bryan, though you never give

me credit for unselfish motives; I wanted you to be in your proper place, to do something great, to live the life you have so longed for."

Of course, Bryan was melted now, and the two made up their little quarrel, as they had done when boy and girl, with penitent caresses and childish little endearments. They were very like children in many things, and in none more than their treatment of each other—at variance one moment, better friends than ever the next, never quite resigned to mutual shortcomings and infirmities, never quite resolute enough to avoid stormy subjects and vain reproaches. How many lives are robbed of all their grace by just this want of courtesy in little things! Every part of the flower is there except the fragrance, and we miss it, and crave for it, and cast longing eyes on other people's gardens, too blind to see that the fault is ours.

It was long past midnight before the two fell asleep. Bryan dreamed of boyish days in the well-loved home on the banks of the Shannon, when his elder brother, Patrick, had been his hero, his idol, and, after childish fashion, his tyrant. Emilia tossed uneasily on her pillow, her slumbers disturbed by a nightmare dream that would not go. A slate and pencil were in her hands, and a spectral schoolmaster stood over her reiterating, with a malignant voice, a sum she could not add up—"Four and three make seven! Four and three make seven! Four and three make SEVEN!"

CHAPTER II.

AND WHAT WILL HELWYSE SAY?

"AND what will Helwyse say?" asked Emilia, with a blank face next morning.

The four young travellers still slept profoundly. The three little girls were not yet dressed, and Bryan was reading his paper, as usual, over a hasty breakfast.

"We shall soon hear. She was to arrive last night, you know, and will be sure to come here the first thing. To-morrow is Sunday, too, thank God!" he added, rising, with a sigh. "We shall have time to talk over everything to-morrow."

"And you will be home early?"

"Oh, of course. Starffe is coming to tea, you know, and we promised to take the children for a country walk. We can go all the same, and, meantime, you had better turn the boys out for a run in the fields, and make the poor things feel at home."

Emilia began to pout, but there was no time for saying more. The horn heralding the omnibus was heard close by, and Bryan had only just time to say good-bye, and pluck the usual blossom for his button-hole before it came up. It was not dandyism, but a vein of poetry in his nature, that led the poor city clerk to do this day after day. The spray of jessamine, the budding rose, the frond of lady-fern, reminded him of country hedges, of woodland joys, and of the glorious summer hours gliding by outside his gloomy prison. For was not Leadenhall Street a prison at this time of the year?

The day was an uneasy one to both husband and wife. Bryan had no time to dwell upon the petty care distracting Emilia's brain, but a weight of undefined trouble lay upon his spirits, making him dull and dreary-faced in spite of himself. Yesterday it seemed to him as if the trammels of toil had dropped from his limbs, and in their place had sprung airy wings, lifting him into the golden realms of fancy. To-day life had taken its usual shape, and he saw before him a long and painful ladder that he must climb as best he could, leading, alas! to nothing.

Poor Bryan and poor Emilia! Whilst the bread-winner was thinking of the delicious dreams of a choicer, fairer existence, now vanished for ever, the matron was lost in housewifely troubles of the smaller kind. She fretted at Bryan's disappointment, but the injustice his generos-

ity would inflict upon their children seemed the hardest thing to bear. She was not an adoring mother. She did not spoil the three little miniature Emilias who in their very faults resembled herself, but they were her children, her very own, and for that reason she would protect them, and fight for them, and suffer for them.

So when the seven cousins had been introduced to each other, and the blonde, blue-eyed little maidens, always dressed as neat as wax, were being petted and admired by the big, broad-shouldered, rough-looking Patrice and the better-favoured Ambroise, she was on the alert to see that no slight was offered them. Had Norah, or Kathleen, or Margie come to her with the least complaint of Patrice's rudeness or Ambroise's crossness, the two boys would straightway have received a sharp reminder. But these huge, over-grown, half French, half

Irish boys were singularly gentle and forbearing among the miniature womankind; and instead of Patrice and Ambroise, it was Norah who domineered, Kathleen who was cross, Margie who lorded it over the big boy cousins, in whose eyes the three were adorable little fairies suddenly fallen from fairyland.

Not that Emilia saw any signs of the humility she thought only becoming in such a position. It never seemed to occur to the frank, high-spirited orphans that they were intruders in their uncle's home, that they were robbing their cousins' heritage. They were meek in their dealings with the little girls, but it was the meekness of the strong protecting the weak, of the rougher towards the gentler sex. Emilia reproached them as she left her housewifely cares to glance at the young people now and then. And she was right regarding the three

younger orphans, only Brigitte held aloof from the noisy group in the garden, looking sad and anxious. When little Hilary left the game to kiss her with almost ecstatic fondness, saying, "Hilaire so happy, so very happy, Brigitte dear," she pressed him to her heart without a word.

"Can I help you, dear aunt?" she had said, after having made the beds and swept the floors of their rooms on her own account. But Emilia said no, though indeed she needed a little aid in the kitchen. Emilia's heart did not warm towards this tall, overgrown, untidy girl, whose long locks and large black eyes inspired her with a sort of terror. Yet Brigitte moved about gently, and though she evidently felt none of her brothers' fascination for the three little girls, she treated them very kindly, almost submissively.

So when Bryan came home, there was

nothing very dreadful to tell of the young invaders. Patrice had not hurled down the garden wall, Ambroise had not broken all the children's toys, Hilaire had not devastated the flower-beds, and Brigitte had not spilled the ink over the new carpet—disasters small indeed to those Emilia had expected. The tea-table was spread with cakes, radishes, and water-cresses, in honour of the expected visitor—Mr. Starffe, the curate; and no one looked very miserable.

Precisely at half-past four the tall, lank figure of the curate might be seen at the garden gate, and little Kathleen came to meet him, telling him the great news all in a breath. Mr. Starffe was a favourite with the children, though too poor to bring anything in his pockets more costly than oranges, and too serious to laugh aloud even over blind man's buff. But he told

them stories and listened patiently to their prattle, and children, unless malignant, like everybody. The little girls clamoured for a place beside the curate, and Norah, a picture-book child, with round blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and flaxen curls always in proper order, would even take his large bony hand and kiss it, saying,

"Dear Mr. Starffe, I love you so!" At five years old we have strange ideals, and Norah thought Mr. Starffe lovely.

When tea was poured out, and the curate had said grace, the conversation turned from the new-comers to the now daily-expected visitor, Helwyse. As sometimes happens, breaking the dull routine of daily life with a blessed ray of unexpectedness, an exquisite rainbow, made up of smiles and tears, amid our common joys, just as they began to talk of Helwyse, whose beautiful Saxon name seemed to bring

with it a fragrance and melody and joy all in one, Helwyse herself appeared. There was a step on the garden path, a sweet voice calling their names, a gracious, girlish figure in white smiling upon all, and in another moment Helwyse was in their midst, clinging to Bryan's arm.

"This is your aunt Helwyse," said Bryan, presenting her to the new-comers proudly, and the elder boys blushed proudly, too, as she put her arms round the neck of each and kissed them with tender love and pity. Bryan had whispered the orphans' story in her ear at the door, and Helwyse loved them already for their dead father's sake. Then she held out her hand to the curate, who now stood stammering and abashed, his eyes brimful of happiness at the sight of her face once more. It was a face that told its own tale. You could read at a glance that to Helwyse had fallen no

common lot, and that her nature had matched the inner and the outer, the soul and the form, with unerring nicety. There was something queenly in this fair young girl, the queenliness of character, as well as beauty, of intellectual gifts as well as of natural graces. When she took off her broad-brimmed straw hat, it was wonderful how her presence embellished the tea-table. That white cambric dress, that blue flower on her bosom, were nothing in themselves, yet how they beautified her! And then Helwyse talked an unfamiliar language very sweet to listen to, and brought a new, fresh atmosphere into the place. All Italy seemed before them as she described her art-life in Rome and Venice, and spoke enthusiastically of places and pictures she had seen. They listened admiringly, and none envied the happy fortunes of the young artist, rich in friends

and fame at twenty-three—except, perhaps, poor Emilia now and then, who thought how much better it was to be free like Helwyse than burdened with wifely, motherly cares like herself.

When tea was over, they all set out for a walk, the children in advance, their elders following after. Bryan always gave the curate an opportunity of a little *tête-à-tête* with Helwyse upon these occasions. He knew that Mr. Starffe was as far removed from Helwyse as north from south; but are there not some perennial romances, delicate yet tenacious plants no winter can destroy? Thus it was with the curate's passion for the beautiful young artist. He never dreamed, or perhaps not more than once a year, of a future linked with hers, he was resigned to his humble position, his narrow means, his lodging over a boot-maker's shop; but he blushed like a girl

when she spoke kindly to him, and was eternally grateful to Bryan for his occasional inuendoes on the subject of his admiration.

To-day, when they had left the road and were crossing the meadows that lead to old Hornsey Church, he found himself alone by Helwyse's side. A glow of perfect summer-tide lay over hill and valley and mead, and the curate's heart throbbed with shy happiness, wishing the walk could last for ever.

"You will be busier than usual now, Miss Helwyse?" he said at last. "And I suppose you have brought home a great many finished pictures?"

Mr. Starffe had tried for her sake to get up a little art-knowledge; he went to the Academy and carefully looked at all the pictures praised in the *Saturday Review;* he visited the National Gallery whenever he

found himself in those parts; he studied handbooks of painting during his holidays. But, alas! that branch of his education was sadly imperfect still, and in a studio he was as much out of place as in a ball-room. Neither to the muses nor the graces had Mr. Starffe learned how to pay court.

"Yes," answered Helwyse, rousing herself from a day-dream, "you must come to tea one day next week, when everything will be unpacked and arranged."

"Oh! you are too kind. I will come on Tuesday," answered the curate, with rapture. "My holidays begin then."

"But I hope you are not going to spend them in London? I am sure you want a little change once a year more than any of us," Helwyse continued, with kindly concern.

"I always go to Ramsgate for a week," the curate replied, resignedly, nay, tri-

umphantly. "The sea-air is so exhilarating, and it is such a pleasant, lively place."

Helwyse smiled. To her Ramsgate in August seemed the reverse of pleasant, no matter how lively; but she would not disenchant him.

"And I shall not be alone," the curate added, still mildly enthusiastic. "Mr. Bickersteth, I mean the curate of St. John's, is going with me. We were at Cambridge together."

"I am very glad," Helwyse said, in a sisterly manner.

"Thank you, dear Miss Helwyse, you are very good," he stammered; and no words can convey an adequate idea of Mr. Starffe's delight at saying this, and watching Helwyse as he said it. She smiled, that grave, maternal kind of smile he knew so well, and her eyes met his with an expression of candid, cordial sympathy. What

excellent friends they were! how kindly she entered into his feelings, he thought! Then they came to the foot of the green slope they had descended together, and were joined by the others. The sun had sunk in splendour over Highgate Hill, and the golden radiance spread over the west was gradually fading into pale amber, studded with silvery stars. There were thrushes singing in the hedges, and wild honeysuckle scenting the air as they went, at every step advancing farther into the dusky world of the summer night. Around the ivy-grown towers of old Hornsey Church rose the tall elms, solemn and sombre sentinels of the quiet graveyard, whilst every feature of the scene, near and far off, was clearly outlined against the pearly sky. Helwyse put her hand within Bryan's arm as the two lingered behind, and said,

"What a beautiful place is this! Yet

how little you have loved it, dear Bryan!"

"And now I shall love it less than ever," Bryan answered. "Of course, it would be madness to give up my clerkship and try my fortune as an author. In harness I am, and in harness I must remain, for these poor children's sake."

Helwyse gave a little start.

"Oh, Bryan, is that so? Have they no one, absolutely no one in the world, to look to but you?"

"Not a creature. Poor Patrick married a portionless girl, and, as you do not know, took to drinking in the later days. His wife's relatives did what they could, but have lately got into trouble themselves; and so, not knowing to whom else to turn, sent the poor things to me. Bridget might have been provided for by a great-aunt, but I believe it was only a home in a convent; and she very properly refused to be

separated from little Hilary. As yet, however, I have learned no particulars—except that they are here, and here they must stay."

"It is very hard upon you."

"Do not say that to Emmie. She naturally feels that it is hard upon our own children, and wants me to get them into charitable institutions, orphanages, and so on. I will never do that whilst I have health and strength. Poor Pat was a good fellow once. He had the kindest heart. He would have taken the last shirt off his back for me. I will never turn his children out of doors, Helwyse—never."

"Perhaps I can help," Helwyse said, with tears in her eyes and in her voice. "I have five hundred pounds laid by, as you know, and I ought to do my part."

"Nonsense, my dear child! You are alone in the world. You have only your

own talent to rely upon. The notion is preposterous."

"But I have not already three little ones to feed," Helwyse said; "and I am already earning a good deal of money. Indeed, dear Bryan, I must do my part; and in a few years' time the elder children will be able to earn their own living."

"In a few years' time I shall be too old to begin life over again. No, Helwyse, I feel that I shall be a city clerk all the days of my life now. I have always believed that I was intended for something better. Most likely it is a delusion."

Helwyse was very silent, very sad. No sister ever loved her brother more fondly than she, and no sister had ever been more ambitious for his sake. She believed in him ardently and entirely. It was very hard.

"How much is your salary?" she asked.

"Three hundred pounds a year. It has just been enough to keep the wolf from the door hitherto; but of course it would be the height of folly to throw up such a certainty. I was promised some work for a newspaper—I think I told you—but I was not promised three hundred pounds a year."

"That is very little," she answered, mournfully, "and four and three make seven, my poor Bryan—four and three make seven."

"Yes, that is an easy sum to reckon up," Bryan said; "but we must make the best of it. Try and cheer poor Emmie, anyhow."

Then their little talk came to an end, for at Crouch End station Helwyse took the train to Kensington, dwelling all the way home on that terrible sum, "Four and three make seven." What would poor

Bryan do? How could she best help him? for help him she must and would.

That slender girl, with her dark, lovely, unfathomable, indescribable Irish eyes and fair hair, had character, you may be sure, and would stand by those she loved till the last.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERIOUS CUPIDS.

HELWYSE was too happy next morning to think of Bryan's trouble, as she took down the key of her studio, full of the delicious experiences of the last few months, and of projects and aspirations for the future. As yet she had not crossed the threshold of her working room since her return from Italy, and the lover's delight at beholding his mistress after a long absence, the joy of a mother at clasping her long-lost child, the transport of a pious worshipper at finding himself once more before the shrine of his patron saint,

are hardly deeper, tenderer, and purer feelings than those of an artist who revisits his studio on returning from a long journey. All that has been hitherto achieved, all that is dreamed of—the praise, the reward, the blessed toil, the bright fulfilment—are present in his mind then as he breathes a sigh of mingled prayer and thanksgiving before re-entering the beloved sanctuary. Thus it was with Helwyse, standing outside her studio door, impatient, yet lingering.

It was early morning, and the chiming of a thousand church bells reminded her that it was Sunday. The open window of the landing-place let in with that familiar music, sounds of chirping birds, and sweet smells of mignonette and lilies. She stood for a moment looking out upon the tiny garden, and across the rows of tall white houses, flashing in the

Morocco carpet, many-hued and harmonious as a field of wild flowers in Algeria, covered the ground.

She uttered a little cry of delight, then, sitting down, contemplated the whole with increasing wonder. Who could have done it? Her first impulse was to go straight to her landlady and put the question, but on second thoughts she refrained. If the mysterious donor, benefactor, beautifier—she knew not what name to use—had wished her to learn his name, it could not be from good, loquacious Mrs. Brag.

Helwyse made sure, as any other girl would have done, that love, and not friendship, had done the deed. She was angry with herself for being so sure about it, but she knew that it was so, and that the mystery meant something, as yet to her mysterious still. But she felt no uneasiness. At twenty-three neither love nor friend-

ship causes us the perplexity and the pain of later years, and we accept surprises without dismay. Helwyse saw in this sign of deep, unspoken care for her happiness, something to rejoice in and smile over only. Moving about her new treasures that bright summer morning, she might have figured for an impersonation of Joy itself. She plucked a red rose, and placed it on her bosom, she clasped an amber necklace about her throat, she disposed the Indian tapestry on her favourite chair, singing to herself all the time.

Whilst thus playfully engaged, a gentle tap was heard at the door.

"It is only Mr. Freeland, Miss Helwyse. I knew you would see *him*," said the landlady, ushering in a man whom at the first glance you would mistake for an artist, at the second you would recognise as a workman, in spite of Sunday dress.

"Of course," said Helwyse, holding out her hand. "I particularly wanted to see Mr. Freeland. I hope you are quite well," she said, giving him a chair.

"Quite well, thank you, Miss Helwyse; and I need not ask you, I am sure," he answered, smiling down upon her. "And pleased to be home again, I hope?"

"More than pleased, overjoyed," she answered, "and I have so much to do. We must begin work at once."

Mr. Freeland has been described as a working man, but his position requires explanation. Helwyse had known him from her earliest student days, for they had gone to South Kensington from the same village home, and though of humble parentage, but for unforeseen circumstances, he was to have been an artist like herself. At seventeen, the ambitious boy had found himself the sole pillar of his widowed mother's

house, dreams and aspirations were rudely crushed at a blow, and to maintain the widow and her younger children, he at once set to work to gain a livelihood for them all as a decorator—artistic decorator, his patrons euphoniously called him—but he was a working man, nevertheless, and so styled himself. Circumstances had much improved since that start in life ten years ago, for he was now twenty-seven. His little sisters had grown up into women and were all married, his mother had inherited a small annuity from a relation, his work was remunerative and of a kind that he relished. People of taste and fortune sent for Mr. Freeland from all parts of the country to decorate their country-houses, but Freeland never for a moment forgot the fact, he was the workman who carried out the artist's designs, nothing more. It was too late for him to change his career now.

Whatever the promise of his early life had been, it could never be fulfilled. Let it not be supposed, however, that he was morbid on these points. The time of poignant regret had come and gone, and he had long ago accepted his position as one of the inevitable decrees of Fortune, against which murmurs and hostility are both childish and cowardly. In looks, speech, and bearing he might have been taken for a high-bred gentleman but for the professional apron he wore at his work, the occasional fits of shyness that would come on him, and the downrightness and often naïveté of his utterance. Respectful and dignified he ever was, but he had never been schooled in the polite art of saying only half what he meant. As far as looks went, if he ever thought of the matter at all, he surely could not reproach Nature. Many an artist had sighed to portray that

fine head, with its close-cut crop of rich brown curls and beard, and those noble features, sunburnt and denoting strength, as a man's should. But when one of the patrons had carelessly said to him,—

"Come, Freeland, be friendly for once and let me have your portrait for my Vercingetorix, as a personal favour, you know,"—and so on, and so on, with delicate flattery and insinuation, Freeland had only given a proud and angry denial.

"But before we talk of anything else," Helwyse said, still moving about among her flowers, "tell me what you think of my studio. Is it not lovely? And the vestibule, could it be daintier?"

"It is well enough," he answered, slightly colouring, but without moving or as much as glancing round the room. His eyes were following her all the time.

"It is perfect, and the studio too," she

said. "And what flowers! I am quite bewitched!"

"The studio was cold and bare before," he remarked.

"True, though I liked it. But now I feel that I shall never want to touch it or improve it as long as I live. Who could have prepared such a surprise for me?"

The last question was intended more for herself than for him, but he asked, still watching her face,

"Have you no idea, Miss Helwyse?"

"As yet I have had no time to think about it. Perhaps I shall guess when I try," she said, without looking up. "For a time the mystery is pleasant."

She thought, and he read her meaning, that most likely he was on the scent, and she wished him to know that a secret it was to remain as long as the mystifier pleased. When she at last tore herself from her

flower-stand, and looked him straight in the face, she made this womanly reflection—"Poor Mr. Freeland, I am sure he has had a hand in beautifying my rooms, but he is not allowed to say who set him to work, and thus his efforts to please me count as nothing."

"I am grateful, though I don't know to whom," she added, significantly. "Everything is lovely. And now when will you come and settle about our work at Beechholme Park? And when will you come and help me to unpack and arrange my pictures?"

"Whenever you please."

"Then let it be to-morrow morning, early."

"Certainly," he said, in the same cold, business-like manner, and taking up his hat to go, adding, "I felt sure you would excuse me for coming to-day, but I knew

you were anxious about the work at Beechholme Park, and I wanted to know if you had returned safe and well."

"Thank you, it was very kind; and, stop one minute more, if you please. Nay, sit down." Helwyse always regarded him as a social equal, by virtue of that art-student companionship at South Kensington, and common country home. "Could you take a pupil?"

Then she explained to him, as briefly as she could, the sudden change of circumstances, in her brother's family, and her anxiety to do something for the orphans. If one of the elder boys had any taste for drawing, and Mr. Freeland would receive him as a pupil, it would be a great comfort to her, and he would thus soon be enabled to maintain himself. The two were eagerly discussing the matter, and all the life and animation had returned to Freeland's face

and voice, when steps were heard on the landing-place, and Mrs. Bray again tapped at the door, saying,

"Mr. Kingsbury, if you please, miss, and he says he is sure he may come in, just to say how-d'ye-do."

Helwyse rose, blushing with pleasure, and held out her hand to a tall, courtly-looking man, almost double her years, but handsome still, who nodded affably to Freeland, and asked after her health with much friendly concern. Then the two began talking eagerly of Italy, both utterly forgetful of the first visitor, who stood by looking on with a blank face.

"But what is the meaning of all this?" said the artist, who had won honours and wealth long ago, and might therefore be pardoned if he mingled a flavour of patronage with chivalrous bearing to this gifted young girl. "What is the meaning of all

this, Miss Fleming? You left your studio simple and unadorned, the very emblem of a frugal and single-minded art-noviciate; you find it filled with spoils of all countries and civilizations, a very palace, fit—for the Queen who reigns in it!" he added, smiling and bowing.

Helwyse laughed merrily, then looked from him to Freeland, half-inquiring, half-expectant. But Kingsbury never so much as glanced at her other visitor, and without the slightest change of countenance, proceeded to examine and criticize the rooms. At that stage of affairs, Freeland, stammering an excuse, and bowing to both, left the room.

"It is very perplexing," Helwyse added; "I am utterly in the dark. I have not the faintest idea as to the authorship of it all."

"I wish, indeed, I could plead guilty—at

least that I had been presumptuous enough to venture upon those Cupids," he said, waiting for the pretty blush that he thought must come. Helwyse, however, frowned instead, not choosing to please her oracle that way.

"I shall hardly find room for my Italian treasures," she said, hastening to change the subject. "I have ruined myself in bronzes and engravings."

"You will soon be rich again. After a year in Italy, we shall expect much from you, remember, and you must not disappoint us. Try only dainty little songs and ballads at present, and leave epics for the future. That little rustic dance you exhibited last year was a work of which any artist might be proud, but the Boadicea was a failure."

"Yes," said the girl sadly. "I could not embody my ideas, though I knew so

well that I was striving after something good and real."

"Wait a little. Inspiration comes first, the power to grapple with it long after. We artists are all like Jacob wrestling in the dark, and it is not till the breaking of the day that the angel blesses us. And now tell me what are your plans for the autumn?"

"I am going next week to Beechholme Park to set Mr. Freeland to work with the decorations, and I have promised to paint some frescoes for Mrs. Cornwell's boudoir."

"Then I shall meet you there, for I am going too. Still I wish you had not promised the frescoes. The people are pleasant people, but your work will be thrown away."

"I cannot quite agree with you. If my work is good, it is surely not thrown away anywhere?"

"Well, the place is charming, and I am very glad we are to meet. That is all I can say. London is intolerable, and I have dined out within an inch of my life during the last few months. Beechholme Park will be ruralizing by comparison."

"And your picture?" Helwyse asked, as he rose to go.

He shrugged his shoulders despairingly.

"Do not ask. I am quite out of heart about it. If Freeland would but condescend to give me half a dozen sittings, the thing might be a masterpiece. But he is intractable, and it will now most likely be thrown into the fire."

"I hope not."

"Then persuade him to give way. He could not refuse you, I am sure."

But Helwyse would not promise, and soon after he took his leave. She sat down before her easel with a little cloud upon her face.

If not he, who then had done the deed? But did it much matter?

She thought not as she took off her necklace, removed the flowers from her bosom, and re-arranged them in a vase, somewhat coldly. The treasure on which her eyes had feasted an hour ago seemed to have become a burden all at once. The little Loves sporting on the wall seemed a mockery. Disenchantment had fallen over her Paradise, and as she gazed around she felt inclined to weep.

But the mood soon passed away, and when Bryan arrived in the afternoon, he found tea spread in the garden, and Helwyse radiant. The two sat out under the lime-trees, talking, as only brothers and sisters can, of old days and new, of joys and griefs long passed, familiar loves and friendships, and childish experience, shared in common. Then they chatted about the children.

"We must find out their tastes, and the one who can draw shall come to me," Helwyse said, decidedly. "When I am away from home, Mrs. Bray is quite to be trusted to look after a child; and a boy could not have a better companion than Mr. Freeland, if we apprentice Patrice or Ambroise to him."

"Poor Patrice is a heavy lad, and would be like a bull in a china shop here," Bryan answered. "Ambroise is the smartest of the two. Something might be made of him, I think. But what could you do with a boy?"

"I could do very well. All day long he would be occupied—in the evenings he could walk out with me."

"If Brigitte consented to leave the little one, why not have her? A girl is handier in a house than a boy, and could help you."

"We will see; but for the next few weeks I shall have to be in the country. I am going to Beechholme Park."

"And I suppose Mr. Kingsbury is going too?"

"Yes."

Bryan laughed a triumphant little laugh.

"He will marry you, my dear."

"Oh, Bryan, you do not know what you are saying!"

"I should not say it to anyone else, Helwyse. But a man of the world finds it easy to conceal his thoughts; and I am convinced in my own mind that he it was, and no other, who has adorned your rooms. Well, you are sure to find out sooner or later."

"I am in no hurry to find out," Helwyse answered; and then they returned to the orphans.

"We must take our little girls from

school, and give up keeping a nursemaid. We must turn vegetarians and teetotallers, renounce our seat in church and penny papers, walk instead of taking omnibuses, and wear sacking instead of broadcloth. What else can we do?" Bryan said, desperately. "I left poor Emmie in tears. The Sunday leg of mutton, that generally lasts till Tuesday, vanished to-day in a twinkling, and she sees nothing but starvation before us."

"Tell her that I am determined to adopt one out of the four," Helwyse said. "That will be a little help. Does Emmie take kindly to the poor things?"

"Not as yet—except, perhaps, to little Hilaire—but he is such a gentle, clinging little thing, someone must love him. Patrice seems a good boy enough, but not brilliant. Ambroise is a pretty, clever, and rather vain little fellow, whilst poor Brigitte seems

lost in thought, and not at ease. Perhaps she realizes their true position; but we must try to make her feel at home."

"Whoever imagined that Patrick cared so little for his children!" Helwyse said. "He used to have the tenderest heart."

"But drink and bad company will ruin a dozen tender hearts. I am sure, from Brigitte's face, that she has gone through terrible scenes with her father."

"Well," Helwyse said, trying to take a cheerful view of things, "we may comfort ourselves with the thought that, if we did not want the children, the children wanted us."

"Yes, indeed; and, after all, it might have been worse. Supposing there were eight instead of four?" Bryan said, smiling grimly; and then they put their heads together to reckon up how his narrow in-

come could be made to go almost as far again—a difficult task, and not conducive to good spirits.

CHAPTER IV.

SETTLING DOWN.

IN spite of her sympathy, the sister's serene life lay remote from the brother's daily cares, as a green little harbour smiling upon a troubled sea. Even Bryan's prison, as he called his office, shut him out from the numberless little anxieties besetting poor Emilia, who naturally felt that the heaviest part of this new burden fell upon her own shoulders. They were not her brother's children; no love of early days bound her to the orphans for their father's sake, yet here they were, and she alone must tend them, feed them, clothe

them. When Bryan said, "Oh, things will go smoothly in time—it is only the settling down that is difficult," she looked ready to cry, and refused to believe that they ever would settle down. The process was certainly a painful one. Had the children looked unhappy, and then made much apology for their intrusion, she could better have borne it; but their gaiety of heart, childish inconsequence, and unconcealed delight at their new position, irritated her sometimes beyond control. Only Brigitte seemed to realise the real state of things, and Emilia's heart did not warm to Brigitte—"an overgrown girl, who was too big to be sent to bed before supper, and whose collars were always crooked," as she described her. "We never have a moment to ourselves now, Bryan," she would say; and Bryan, dreading the usual catalogue of daily miseries, sure to come

whenever they found themselves alone, could not look sorry.

Summer-time was the great consoler. The goldenest, balmiest time of the year, August, had come, when all the hills were mellow with ripened corn, and the stock-dove brooded in silent woods far away. Even at Hornsey Rise, summer was glorious. Perhaps the mists of the great city dimmed the brightness of sunny slopes, and took off from the freshness of the morning breeze; but there were, nevertheless, wild roses and honeysuckle in the wayside hedges, foxgloves on the ferny banks of Highgate Wood, and even a harvest-field or two at Wood Green. The children, under Brigitte's care, spent the greater part of the day out-of-doors, making daisy-chains under the shade of wide-spreading oak, fishing with bent pins in some woodland pool, or gathering wild flowers here and there, Brigitte

marshalling, Brigitte commanding, Brigitte scolding the little troop. It was wonderful to see how entirely Brigitte had obtained mastery over the boys, who, wild, noisy, and mischievous though they were, like others, never contested her sisterly authority.

The cousins presented a striking contrast, Emilia's children being small, neat, and pretty as miniature shepherdesses on Dresden china. Brigitte and her elder brothers, on the contrary, were as yet slovenly in dress and shape, very tall and large, moreover, for their age, and wore outlandish-looking pinafores, frocks, and pantaloons. "Do get those poor children clothes like other people's," Bryan had said more than once; but Emilia put it off from day to day. She owned that they sadly wanted new clothes, but were not Norah and Kathleen in want of Sunday pelisses?

and who were to be sacrificed, her own children or the strangers?

Little they thought of clothes and fashions, as they sported in the woods and fields throughout the glowing afternoons! Poor children! Never in their lives had they been so well housed, so well fed, so free from care. At present, too, the boys were in the heyday of this new romantic friendship with the trio of blonde little beauties—Kathleen, Margie, and Norah; for do not children play out in miniature those sentimental dramas, whether of friendship or love, that cost us so much in after-life?

Kathleen, then, aged eleven, a good, proper-minded, priggish little person, who never walked into the mud, tore her frocks, or surprised people in any way—often the highest moral standard some minds can attain to—was the sworn friend and con-

fidante of Patrice—thoughtless, warm-hearted, blundering Patrice, who was twice as big as herself and had not so much as a grain of vanity in his composition.

Margie, three years younger, and one degree less proper-minded than Kathleen, was already a heartless little coquette, entirely devoted to Ambroise to-day, but sure to throw him over for a new favourite to-morrow—a little girl who danced well, was fond of a looking-glass, and always ran away from a scrape.

Norah, the youngest, all flaxen hair and kisses, was as yet a mere baby, who fancied that Norah's kitten, Norah's doll, and Norah's little toys were perfection, and, if found fault with, was ready to throw them into the fire in her passion. Hilaire kissed Norah a hundred times a day, and loved her all the better, because she was the first little friend of his life.

"How nice it is to be here! How nice it is to be here!" he said, as the little party sat one day making daisy chains on a green slope at the back of One Tree Hill. "I am so happy, Brigitte."

He was a fair-faced, gentle boy, whose mind seemed incapable of taking in anything but love and joy. Are there not some children thus constituted? Fortune may not have been particularly kind to them, nor Nature either. They have perhaps to endure privations and sufferings of which most children know nothing. Yet their little lives are one long ecstasy of gratitude and affection. Alas! for them when these joyous instincts are crushed altogether. There is no more heart-wringing sight in the world than the so-called misery of a workhouse, when, from amidst a crowd of dull, hard-faced little beings, some radiant young thing will rush up to you, clutching

your garments with its little hands, thanking you, as best it can, for your kindly smile, longing, craving, compelling a caress.

Of such a nature was Hilaire. His existence was made up, not of toys and pleasures, but of Love; and it was Brigitte he loved best of all.

Her young face, so maternal already in its expression of tenderness and devotion, brightened as he said this; then she only kissed him by way of response, and went on with her daisy chain in silence.

"Why are you so mute, Brigitte?" asked Ambroise, a bright-looking curly-headed boy, always popular and always able to get out of scrapes. "You look as you used to do when papa was——"

He stopped short, crimsoning under Brigitte's frown. Patrice also blushed painfully. Ambroise, quickly recovering himself, finished his sentence—

"When papa was ill; of course you know what I meant to say."

"I know why Brigitte is mute," little Norah said, laughing. She would most likely grow up into one of those pretty, gentle-faced women we sometimes see, who relate or behold the most appalling occurrences with a smile.

"Why is poor Brigitte mute?" Hilaire asked, caressing her.

"Because she is going to be sent away, and I know Brigitte is to go away; mamma told Mr. Starffe so."

"You are very naughty to tell tales," Kathleen said, drawing herself up. "Where do you expect to go to when you die, Norah?"

"I don't mind," Norah said, for she was the naughty girl of the family. "I shall take dolly with me; and the 'Peep of Day' is all wrong about hell-fire, I'm certain.

Why, any goose must know that if I threw dolly into the fire, she must be burnt to cinders in no time."

"Naughty, naughty child," Kathleen said. "But don't you mind what she says, Brigitte dear."

"I am not going to be sent away," Brigitte said, her dark eyes flashing. "I shall stay with Hilaire till he grows up."

"Well, dear," Kathleen continued, patronizingly, "of course if mamma says so, go you must."

"I shall stay with Hilaire till he grows up! I will never leave him—never!" Brigitte repeated.

"If mamma bids you go! Oh! Brigitte," Kathleen said, horrified.

"Oh! Brigitte," echoed Margie.

"Oh! Brigitte," re-echoed Norah.

Brigitte's words of defiance were like a firebrand thrown into the peaceful little

encampment. The girl was in earnest, and they saw it, Patrice and Ambroise with secret pride, the little girls with a sense of personal affront.

"Is not Brigitte naughty?" cried the three, turning towards the hitherto submissive young cavaliers.

Hilaire looked at Ambroise. Ambroise looked at Patrice.

"No, she is not," Patrice cried stoutly. "Brigitte is good; and if you were boys instead of girls, I'd fight you."

"And so would I," Ambroise cried, clapping his hands.

Hilaire clung to Brigitte without a word. Kathleen burst into angry tears. Margie and Norah followed. Never was a scene of harmony and mirthfulness so quietly changed to tumult and contention.

"I am sure I wish you had all staid in France," Kathleen said, between her sobs.

"It was much nicer before you came. Patrice has broken my doll's house, Ambroise has spoilt my garden, and Hilaire has got my bed."

"And my stockings," Margie said, sobbing also.

"And my nightgowns," Norah cried, as if at that moment her heart were breaking.

"And we are not to have new dresses because mamma has so many things to buy for you. We were to have had pink ones and sashes, and pelerines to match," began Kathleen, with a fresh burst of crying. "It is very unfair, Brigitte, and you ought not to have come without an invitation."

It was now the boys' turn to flush crimson and shed tears.

"Uncle Bryan is papa's brother, and poor papa had no money. What would you do, Kathleen, if you had no money and no papa?" said Ambroise. "I hate you."

"Uncle Bryan would not let you say such things, Kathleen," Patrice said, looking very disconsolate and helpless as he wiped away a big tear with his coat sleeve.

"I am sure mamma will scold *you* when you get home," responded Kathleen, viciously, upon which Hilaire began to cry also.

Brigitte, who alone retained composure, took him into her motherly young arms and soothed him as best she could; but the storm was still at its height when two little city urchins happened to pass that way, and a sudden comic turn was given to the situation. The two lads, who were in fact marauders by profession, and had been helping themselves to eggs in a neighbouring farm-yard, being in an unusually jovial frame of mind, no sooner saw what was going on than they put their hands on their knees, opened their mouths, and set up an imitative howl. This was too much.

Patrice's face at once resumed its usual expression, and he put on a defensive attitude. Ambroise took up a stick, and their tormentors making off, they pursued as fast as their legs could carry them. The diversion had a favourable effect on all. The little girls dried their tears and ran after pursuers and pursued. Hilaire began to laugh heartily, and even Brigitte, in her amusement, forgot the cause of the general disturbance. When, after a quarter of an hour, the five returned, arms entwined and cheek laid to cheek, she knew that the quarrel was made up, and willingly kissed Kathleen and her sister, who hung about her, anxious to make friends.

"Don't mind what Norah says, Brigitte dear, she is never happy except when making a commotion; and, you know, we all like you to be here, because you give us shorter Sunday lessons than mamma, and

always carry the cloaks and umbrellas when we are afraid it will rain," Kathleen said.

Brigitte walked home with a thoughtful face. Whilst the others gambolled and prattled, she was thinking all the time of the storm, the battle, the dreary conflicts implied in Norah's careless words. This young girl of fifteen with her large heart and wild, untrained nature had but one thought, one care, one ambition: to do her duty to these orphan children and to make little Hilaire happy. The others must be fitted to go out into the world and wage the warfare of life for themselves as best they could; but she felt as if little Hilaire, who was girlishly fair and delicate, and who had never known his mother's face, would always stand in need of her sheltering love and protection. Come what might, nothing should separate her from him, and she began to ask herself what she could do

to become a stay rather than a burden in her uncle's house. Her passionate love for Hilaire quickened her faculties, sharpened her wits, opened her mind to practical things, and she had seen from the first that it was duty rather than inclination that actuated kindness on the part of her heart. How could she win over that unwilling heart, reconcile that unyielding nature for Hilaire's sake? Poor Brigitte! of her self she never thought. But for Hilaire, she would have willingly turned nursemaid, scullerymaid, and gone out for hire, anything than bear slights and insinuations.

When tea was over and the younger children were in bed, Emilia and Brigitte would generally busy themselves with needlework till Bryan came home. Brigitte resolved to take this opportunity of speaking to her aunt.

"Auntie," she began tremblingly; for

though Emilia was pretty and gentle to look at, Brigitte stood somewhat in awe of her. "Auntie, if you send Mary Ann away, will you let me take her place?"

"How do you know Mary Ann is going away?" asked Emilia, sharply; "I hope, Brigitte, you are not given to listening at the door!"

The girl crimsoned, and angry tears rose to her eyes, but controlling herself, she answered very meekly,

"You forget, dear aunt, that you and Uncle Bryan talked about it last night at supper, and I have been thinking I could quite well do all that Mary Ann does, and teach Hilaire too."

"Nonsense!" Emilia said, still in the same quick, metallic tones. "You are fifteen, Brigitte, and it's high time you were beginning to learn something. My niece as a nursemaid is not to be thought

of. No, I will tell you what you are going to do, and I am sure we ought all to be thankful that such an opportunity has been put in our way. You know where Stoke Newington is, don't you?"

"Yes," poor Brigitte replied with pale cheeks and terror-stricken eyes.

Had Emilia been an inquisitor and Brigitte a heretic to whom the stake was held out as an ultimatum, she could not have looked more aghast.

"Well," Emilia continued, "there is a very nice school for young ladies there, and the lady who keeps it is willing to take you for nothing, provided you speak French to the girls out of school-hours, and help with the little ones. You will come home every Sunday, you will learn music and other accomplishments. What is the matter?"

For Brigitte had again grown crimson, and this time large tears rolled down her

cheeks, as she tried to speak in vain.

"It is ridiculous to make a fuss about it. Why, most girls would like it much better than being at home. You will have nice new clothes. I am going to cut up one of my own silk dresses for you. Your Uncle Bryan intends buying you a new hand-bag and silk umbrella."

"I cannot leave Hilaire," Brigitte said, making a desperate effort to control herself, so as to plead Hilaire's case fairly. "He is so fond of me."

"What will you do when you are grown up, if you remain an ignoramus?" asked Emilia, bringing down her battering-ram of common sense against poor Brigitte's passionate sentimentality, as she held it. "You are old enough to think of these things, Brigitte. You must know that your uncle has enough to do to educate and maintain his own children, and we

must sacrifice their prospects to give the boys a start in life. We cannot do impossibilities. You must fit yourself to earn your own living like the rest."

"I cannot leave Hilaire," Brigitte repeated, whom her aunt's seeming hardness only braced up to renewed effort on Hilaire's behalf. "I have never left him since he was a baby. I am like a mother to him. He would pine away without me."

"Of course it is hard for you to leave him, but you will see him every Sunday. You will have long holidays, and though it is natural that you should think most of yourselves, you must consider us a little, Brigitte. Were your uncle in easy circumstances, it would be quite another matter. You are bound to do what is best for all."

"Oh! auntie, I must think most of what is best for Hilaire. He is the youngest, and was only a month old when mamma

died. Mamma said to me, 'You will never leave Hilaire, will you, Brigitte!' And I said to her, 'Never, mamma, never, as long as I live.' And she died the next day, and it was always I who looked after him, because the boys were so young, you know, and papa was a great deal away. Hilaire loves me better than anything in the world. I could not leave him, even if I had never made that promise to mamma."

"You were a child, and did not know what you were doing," Emilia answered, softening a little, but by no means disposed to yield. "You could not tell then what would be best to do for him when you were both older. And you ought to take your Uncle Bryan and me into account, and help instead of hinder, when we try to act for your good. But pray don't look so miserable about it. I will hear what your uncle has to say."

"There's a good deal I could do in the house, without being quite nursemaid," Brigitte said, eagerly. "I could look after the little ones, and mend their clothes, and teach them French, only let me stay with Hilaire, dear aunt."

"I repeat, we must hear what your uncle has to say. We cannot make Hilaire the first person in the house. Now go and see the boys to bed. They are making a noise that is positively disgraceful."

As it happened, Bryan came home, tired and out of spirits that night, in no humour for the usual discussion about the children, as Emilia saw. But she was one of those women who lack the homely wisdom of "dieting to the repast." So instead of waiting a little till Bryan had recovered from the heat and lassitude of the day, she began at once.

"I am sure we may as well all betake

ourselves to the workhouse at once. Here is Brigitte crying as if her heart would break at the very idea of the Stoke Newington school. You must really talk to her, Bryan, for if we are to keep Brigitte in idleness and ignorance all the rest of her days, I don't see why my children should be expected to give up anything."

"Oh! let us wait a little," Bryan said, with pardonable irritation.

"Why wait? Depend on it if we don't accept the offer now, we shall not get such another. We shall wait and wait till we get into debt. The butcher's bill is half again what it used to be, the baker's bill is doubled, the milk mounts up to a little fortune——"

"Well, send Mary Ann away. That will be one mouth less to feed."

"No, if Brigitte stays, Mary Ann stays. I am not going to deprive my children of a

nursemaid just because Brigitte pleases."

"Brigitte seems handy in the house. Let her help with the children till Hilaire is older," Bryan said. "The little lad looks so delicate——"

"Bryan, what would the neighbours say? I should be looked upon as a pretty kind of aunt if I allowed Brigitte to run errands and answer the door."

"D——n the neighbours," Bryan added, his hands thrust in his pockets and his locks pulled over his brow. "Let us have supper first and quarrel afterwards."

"We shall have to do without supper," Emilia answered, rising; "and I am sure I would rather go to bed supperless any day than have to listen to bad language,"—saying which, she dashed out of the room, keys in hand, and on the point of crying. When at last supper appeared, it was more frugal and worse served than usual.

Emilia ate in silence, and Brigitte, pale as a ghost, with traces of tears on her cheeks, glanced furtively from one to the other, trying to read her fate in their downcast looks.

When the meal was over, no wonder that Bryan took refuge in a cigar and a solitary stroll. How would it all end? he asked himself, and the question was one that rose to his mind twenty times a day. The children were impracticable, Emilia was impracticable; the evening's occurrence was sure to repeat itself again and again, bringing a succession of little storms, little irritations, little quarrels, more trying to bear, perhaps, than the greater troubles he felt were looming in the future. And none could be run away from, none could be avoided, none could be hindered by his own efforts only.

Such superb evenings had hitherto been

enjoyed by the poor city clerk with poetic fervour—he indeed fancying himself a poet in his happier moments. Formerly, he used to wander amidst the groves and thickets of Highgate, listening to the nightingale, rapturously as Keats, whose familiar haunts were here. He had gazed a hundred times on Coleridge's old dwelling amid the lime-trees, he had walked across the Tottenham fields to Edmonton thinking of Charles Lamb, lingering lovingly by his humble grave, feeling for the moment as if he himself belonged to the noble brotherhood, humblest of humble singers though he might be. Every spot connected with these men was sacred to him, and inspired him with gracious thoughts, thoughts as far removed from daily toil within four walls of a city office, as mid-winter on the longest day in June, thoughts that made life a blessed and lovely thing.

Alas! To-day his mind was full of aching cares that had their root in the common earth, and anxieties that did not partake of the spiritual and the sublime. What could he do to meet these growing demands on his purse? How could he arm himself to battle with Fortune in this unequal fight?

Bryan, no more than Emilia, was wholly wise. He was no coward to quail before adversities, but he could not grapple with hard circumstances and bend them to his will. He was kindly of heart, especially to women, and he wanted to let both Emilia and Brigitte have their way. He returned home as far off as ever from the determination to enforce those economies which he knew were necessary, and which Emmie felt so hard for her children's sake. Expenses must be diminished, hardships endured, but for whom, by whom, she

asked, and he in his turn might well ask with increased bitterness, how would it all end?

CHAPTER V.

TEA IN A STUDIO.

A PROUD, happy man was Mr. Starffe, when, having carefully arrayed his gaunt and impracticable person in the nearest approach to morning-dress admissible in a curate, he set out to take tea with Helwyse. Mr. Starffe lived over a bootmaker's shop, had a stipend of a hundred pounds yearly, possessed no aristocratic relations, and was the humblest of the humble in his own estimation; but this condescension on the part of a gifted, beautiful, and already

famous young artist, elated him more than words can tell. He never for a moment dreamed that it meant love; he was not presumptuous enough to imagine such a possibility, even when Helwyse was kindest. It certainly did, however, mean cordial liking, and if cordial liking from a girl like Helwyse was not something to gratify any man, much more a poor solitary, hard-working curate, what is?

Mr. Starffe had kindly consented to take some of the elder children, so in high glee the little party set off. Kathleen fine as a little pantomime fairy; Brigitte radiant, because the Stoke Newington scheme was pronounced in abeyance for the present; Patrice and Ambroise delighted at the notion of making friends with Aunt Helwyse, who seemed to them just perfection. All three were sadly threadbare and

shabby. Brigitte's dress, like poor Patrice's pantaloons, was much too short; Ambroise had grown out of his tunic long ago—but what did they care? Bryan had said, "Pray don't let the children go to Kensington till you have bought them some new clothes!" to which Emilia retorted, and with excellent reasoning, "I must wait and see what can be done with your old ones first, Bryan. Boys are boys, you know, and victuals are more necessary than fine clothes." But, mother-like, she took care that Kathleen's white frock should be made as stiff as starch could make it, and had quietly slipped out in the morning to buy her a new sash.

No wonder the children thought Mr. Starffe delightful. He indulged them with buns and ginger-beer at King's Cross, with penny ices at Notting Hill, and told stories of his much-beflogged boyhood

all the way. Hand in hand, with beaming faces, they walked up the shady lane leading to Helwyse's home, she watching for them, and smiling to them from the balcony. She ran down to the door to meet them, looking fresh as a rose in her pink cambric dress, then, saying kind things to all, led them upstairs.

"I persuaded Mrs. Bray to let me have tea in the studio," she said; "but it was no easy matter. 'How a Christian can eat with all them heathen hobjects a-gaping and a-staring at 'em, I can't imagine,' she said;" upon which they all laughed heartily, and even Mr. Starffe made his little joke.

How enraptured they were with everything! How they praised, gazed, wondered, and admired! Helwyse felt herself twice as rich as she had been an hour ago, and their uncritical comments brought back her old pride in her

treasures. She took pains to show them all by turns, explaining this, descanting on that, gradually growing as enthusiastic as her visitors. Was anyone in all the world so clever, so gracious, so sweet? thought the curate. Was any princess in fairy-tale so kind and so beautiful as Aunt Helwyse? thought the children.

"That is an uncommonly fine torso," said Mr. Starffe, venturing on an art-criticism as diffidently as an unskilful skater on ice.

"You are quite right. It is the best thing in the room," she answered.

"And that is an exquisite little water-colour sketch," continued the curate, growing more venturesome.

"No, I cannot agree with you there," Helwyse said. "It is an early drawing of my own, but sadly crude and wanting in

tone. See, here is a much better attempt at the same subject; and as you like it, I will give it to you."

"Indeed. I shall be most proud and happy to own it," cried Mr. Starffe, delighted beyond measure. "I shall value it more than anything I possess."

"I hope not," she said, somewhat absently. She was ransacking the portfolio for something to give the children. A prettier picture it were hard to find than the slender, fair-haired, serious-faced girl-artist on her knees, distributing largesses to these humble admirers. When she had found what she wanted, and enchanted her young visitors with sketch or photograph, tea was brought in, and all sat down, laughing and talking gaily. Mr. Starffe had the post of honour by the side of his hostess, and helped her with the urn.

Brigitte cut bread and butter, Kathleen presided over the jam, and the boys over the cake. It was an Aladdin's feast to all, and while they sat eating and drinking amid these lovely pictures, gorgeous carpets, and foreign riches of all kinds, Helwyse entertained them with stories of Italian travel and experience, Mr. Starffe proudly coming to her aid when she halted at a classical name or date. He knew his Roman history pretty well, his Lemprière fairly, and could even, upon occasions, quote Horace to Helwyse, who, regarding him as a mine of information, would ask the names of the three Furies, the story of the Calydonian boar, and Ovid's version of Pygmalion. Mr. Starffe flushed with pleasure as he found himself so useful to his lovely friend. He ransacked his brains for facts and quotations that might prove serviceable, and

marvelled at himself when he repeated aloud, with passable elocution, as he thought, a stanza or two of Chapman's Homer.

It was all quite delightful, but such periods of untarnished bliss cannot last for ever, and in the midst of this sociability and enjoyment, there came a thundering flunkey's knock at the front door. Each started at that imperious sound, which penetrated into every corner of the slenderly-built house. Kathleen ran to the window, the boys followed, and all was expectation, when the rustling of silk skirts was heard on the stairs, and a pleasant-faced, lavishly-dressed woman entered, leading by the hand a little girl, also attired in the extreme of fashion.

"Ah! it is Mrs. Cornwell," said Helwyse, cordially.

"And we are interrupting a merry party,

I fear. I am very glad to see you again, my dear Miss Fleming. But who are your young visitors ?"

Helwyse presented first the curate, and then the children, Brigitte and her brothers seeming to expand into added largeness and awkwardness under the visitor's scrutinizing, but not unfriendly glances.

"So these are French nephews and a French niece just arrived, are they ? And where do they live?" asked Mrs. Cornwell, who was rich and benevolent, and had been Helwyse's first art-patron years ago.

Helwyse bade the rest finish their tea, and drawing her friend into the vestibule, told her of the children's sad fate and unexpected arrival.

"It is hard upon poor Bryan," she said. "And now he must remain a clerk till they are grown up and provided for. I

think of apprenticing one to Mr. Freeland —the second boy, I think—and looking after him generally."

"Do no such thing. Boys are such terrible creatures to have to do with," answered Mrs. Cornwell, who was the mother of several. "He will come home with a broken nose one day, will tumble into the Serpentine the next, and you won't have a whole bit of furniture in your home by the time his first week is out."

Helwyse laughed merrily.

"Then he would have to go back to Bryan. But, dear Mrs. Cornwell, I am sure you will understand how anxious I am about my brother."

"Well, help him in other ways. You see, my dear, your career may just be said to have begun, and if you hamper yourself with domestic cares and anxieties, it will spoil everything. At present your mind

is free—keep it so—at least till you marry. Your duty in life is to paint good pictures, at present."

"But with a clear conscience," Helwyse said, smiling gravely; "indeed it is as clearly my duty to help Bryan as it is to do my work well. The children's father was my brother as well as Bryan's—they are as near to me as to him; and he has three of his own. I would take two if I could."

"Don't be Quixotic. One will be the death of you. But, my dear, bring the monster with you to Beechholme, or at least one of the children. I don't mind which. I think the girl looks the most promising. At present she is all angles and awkwardness—but what fine eyes she has! And what character in the mouth. Bring her, will you?"

"You are too kind."

"Nonsense. We will see what we can make out of her, and if she is nice, I should not mind how long she stayed with my little girls. But I must go. I only came to say, how d'ye do, and to see how you were looking—which is quite charming." And, saying this, she kissed her heartily on the cheek. "And how charming your rooms are!" she added, looking round.

"Therein lies a mystery which perhaps you can reveal," Helwyse said. "I left my rooms bare, as you remember them, to find them quite magnificent. Can you help me out of my perplexity?"

In her secret heart at that moment she believed Mrs. Cornwell to be the origin of her recently-acquired wealth.

"I am as innocent in the matter as a new-born baby. I wish I had done it, but I did not," the lady answered, and

so the mystery was left more unfathomable than ever.

When her two visitors had gone, and Helwyse had told her news, the two boys clapped their hands with joy at Brigitte's good fortune. Brigitte going to stay in a country house! Brigitte going to ride in a carriage! Brigitte going to see all kinds of beautiful things! Only Brigitte's face was downcast.

"It's Hilaire she's thinking about, Aunt Helwyse," Patrice said. "Brigitte wouldn't leave Hilaire if somebody came to wed her in a gilt carriage, like Cinderella's prince."

"No, I wouldn't," Brigitte answered, looking sad, sulky, and suspicious, all at once. "Let one of the boys go in my place, Aunt Helwyse."

"Oh! me," cried Ambroise, whose mind was so much quicker than poor Patrice's,

that he generally contrived to obtain the advantage. Patrice feebly echoing, "Oh! let me go, Aunt Helwyse, I am the eldest."

"But, dear boys, you are not invited," Helwyse said, to whom Brigitte's persistence seemed, for the moment, mere obstinacy. "Surely you could leave little Hilaire for three or four weeks, Brigitte?"

"I cannot leave Hilaire," answered the girl, reiterating the familiar phrase with almost a savage air. "I don't care about the country. I should hate riding in a carriage. I only want to stay with Hilaire."

And there was something so pathetic in the eager young face and voice as she uttered the words, that Helwyse forbore to press the matter. After all, who could so well tell as Brigitte what made little Hilaire happy or not!

"I would take Hilaire out for a walk," Ambroise said, thinking it better that

Brigitte should go rather than all stay at home.

"And I would undress him at night," added Patrice.

"You would both teaze him a dozen times a day," Brigitte answered with temper.

Then the matter dropped, for the boys, rough and tormenting as they were in many ways, obeyed Brigitte as if she were the sternest stepmother described in story-books.

The little party soon after prepared for going home, Helwyse offering to accompany them to the station. On their way it occurred to her that here was an excellent opportunity of introducing the boys to Mr. Freeland, who had agreed to take the aptest as pupil. So just as Freeland was sitting down to tea, after the day's work, he caught sight of his five visitors at the garden-gate.

He had lodgings over a coachbuilder's shop, such as many a poor artist might envy; but then it must be remembered that Mr. Freeland, as a working man, was almost rich, and, having neither wife nor children, might reasonably indulge in what are really the luxuries of life, a little sun, a little space, and a little more than absolutely necessary breathing room. So he rented, in the quiet little lane or alley, the very existence of which would be ignored by passers-by in the high road, so secluded, so solitary it was, a tiny parlour overlooking a bit of flower-garden, and one of the large suburban parks abounding in Campden Hill; an attic to sleep in, clean, large, and airy; and a spacious workshop, and, more correctly speaking, a studio at the back. The scholarly taste and refinement of the man were visible as you merely glanced round the little parlour which barely

sufficed to hold himself and his visitors. There were books, many and good, on the shelves, artistic little trifles on the mantelpiece, and a bust of Dante on a pedestal in one corner. He rose from the tea-table as they entered, colouring with pleasure, and handed a chair to each, himself standing all the while.

'Why would he never sit down when talking to her? Why could she not invite him to tea as well as Mr. Starffe?' thought Helwyse, who, without being at all given to the study of political economy or social questions, could not help feeling indignant at so-called *convenances* sometimes. Mr. Freeland was almost as good company as Mr. Kingsbury, she thought, and was the very soul of manliness, dignity, and good feeling. Why, then, had society set up such barriers between him and his real equals? Her philosophy went no farther

than this, and she did not often speculate on the matter at all.

"May we go into your studio?" she said. "The boys want to see the plans of your mural decorations for Beechholme Park, and you have always so much to show."

"You are most welcome to see my work," he answered, leading the way. Then, with great courtesy, he did the honours of his studio, explaining this to Mr. Starffe, pointing out that to the boys, abundantly bestowing information upon all. It was a very large place; and what with casts, plans, and designs, there was plenty to interest them. Mr. Starffe was delighted.

"How improving is all this!" he said to Helwyse, enthusiastically. "How it enlarges the understanding! I shall no more envy my vicar because he has been to Rome."

The workman smiled, and with just a

touch of satire in his voice, answered—

"Many people come back from Rome as ignorant as they went, for that matter, sir; but I have something to show you now worth all the rest put together." And saying this, he drew from a portfolio a very beautiful photograph of Athens. The view was taken from the western side, showing the wide-stretching plain, the long chain of Hymettus, the scattered city, the majestic temple and fallen column of the Olympeum, and, towering above all on its airy height, the wondrous, the inimitable Parthenon!

"Ah! that is indeed a gem. I will make my next Sunday's sermon about St. Paul preaching at Athens," said Mr. Starffe, rapturously; then, taking out note-book and pencil, added to Freeland—"Pray go on with your observations, sir, and I am sure you will kindly excuse me if I take them down."

Freeland's eyes met Helwyse's with a smile rippling their brown depths. What business had a workman with such eyes? once asked a Belgravian beauty, contemptuously; but for the most part Freeland had been favoured rather than persecuted for his noble looks. Is not beauty the only passport written in every language that we know of? There it is, and neither pomp nor poverty, kingly apparel nor nakedness, can alter it; neither judges nor seneschals can question its authority. Is not, moreover, one ill-favoured face the more, one joy the less in the world? Helwyse, woman-like, or artist-like, if you will, always felt grateful to Freeland in that he was "beautiful and well-favoured."

"The great theatre, discovered within our own times, is here," began their instructor. "Those narrow lines, running parallel to each other in a semi-circle, are

the seats——Oh! my dear lad, what *are* you about?"

This last remark was addressed to Patrice, who, having laid hands on a pot of liquid vermillion and Mr. Freeland's pet kitten, which had strayed into the studio after its master, was trying the decorative effect of vermillion on the animal's tail. Patrice, being thus reprimanded, naturally let pussy go, and what might be expected took place, Ambroise convulsed with laughter at the sight, the rest smiling, but dismayed. Pussy, delighted at recovering freedom, and excited by the general attention bestowed upon her, began frisking about to the best of her youthful ability, smearing a clean sheet of pasteboard here, a plaster cast there, working woe and devastation everywhere.

"Catch her!" cried Freeland, desperately, but that word of command was injudi-

cious. The boys dashed forward in wild pursuit, committing sundry breakages. Mr. Starffe's excellent intentions were only rewarded by a smear of vermillion across his best Sunday pantaloons. Helwyse's pretty cambric dress got so many red daubs that it looked like a bed of cabbage roses strewn with scarlet poppies. Freeland escaped scot-free no more than the rest. When, at last, the mad chase was brought to an end, and pussy secured, all joined in a hearty laugh—how was it possible to do otherwise?—but the laughter was followed by a pause of general dismay.

"I am indeed sorry our visit should have ended so unfortunately," Helwyse began. "Do tell us if any serious mischief is done."

"Oh! make your mind easy," poor Freeland answered gaily, though he knew that one drawing, the work of weeks, was ruined.

"But your dress, Miss Helwyse—will it ever come right?"

He was thinking that, for the pleasure of seeing her there again, he would willingly encounter Patrice's mischievousness a dozen times, and now fetching a sponge and warm water, went on his knees to try to wash out the stains. The boys helped, Mr. Starffe held the basin of water; a happy diversion was thus given to affairs, and poor Patrice escaped with only a severe scolding from Brigitte.

"That will do, I think," Helwyse said, when the largest of the vermillion spots had partially disappeared.

"No, indeed, here is another blotch," Freeland said, wishing the task could last for ever.

"And here's another!"

"And another," echoed the boys; so by the time the business was accomplished it

was growing dark, and Mr. Starffe gallantly forbade his young hostess accompanying them any farther.

"We have had a most delightful visit, Miss Helwyse, and a most improving one, thanks to you, sir," he said, holding out his hand to Freeland. "I am only sorry that my young friend's indiscretion has damaged your valuable property, but at that age we are all more or less prone to think more of the moment's amusement than its consequences."

Then, after repeated adieux, the little party took leave of their entertainers.

Mr. Starffe perhaps never felt happier than when walking across Campden Hill to Notting Gate Station that summer night. Whilst the children prattled of Aunt Helwyse, her pretty home, her amazing talents, her sweetness, her generosity, her hosts of friends, he answered mechanically, lost in an intoxicating dream of bliss.

Such moments, wasted as they seem to be, when the mind is filled to overflowing with a joy, evanescent, far-off, and unreachable as the golden clouds of a summer dawn, have their religiousness, their perpetuity, their heroism. We feel that the ineffable future, so real to us for the nonce, can never be ours—the love we crave for, the happiness we are capable of, the perpetual existence we believe in—yet just as devotees before some favourite saint, we go on worshipping, hoping, trusting, and the poor, common life is ennobled by its very unrealness!

CHAPTER VI.

FREELAND'S FRENCH LESSONS.

WHEN Mr. Starffe and his companions had taken leave, Freeland said, seizing his hat eagerly—

"It is too late for you to be walking in these deserted lanes alone, Miss Helwyse; permit me to see you home."

"Thank you very much, though I have no fear," Helwyse said.

The thought of that terrible incubus, propriety, rarely occurred to this ingenuous girl; and putting aside propriety, what woman could have a more chivalrous protector than Arthur Freeland? So the

offer was accepted as a matter of course, and the two set out. Just as they had left the garden a little maid-of-all-work came running after them, crying at the top of her voice—

"If you please, Mr. Freeland, missus wants to know what we are to say to the French teacher when he comes."

"Bid him wait," Freeland said, colouring to the temples; then he turned to Helwyse, adding, explanatorily—"I am studying French. It is very useful in my business."

"Yes, indeed, quite necessary, I should think," Helwyse answered, never dreaming that he had told only half the truth. For the whole of the truth was this—Freeland was, of all mortals, the most ambitious, not of so-called worldly good—he cared little enough for that—but he was ambitious of knowledge, of wisdom, of all that

lifts human life above its baser part. He wanted to feel that, in so far as the mind's furniture went, he was no man's scullion and inferior; that, in so far as the fashioning of his own existence was concerned, it should be goodly and fair to look upon, nothing to shame the eyes of God and his fellow-creatures—above all, nothing to humble himself. So he studied all the things that go to make up a complete and worthy intellectual being—languages, literature, science, art—not as the bookworm or the pedant, hoarding mental gold morbidly, but as the healthy-minded, inquisitive, knowledge-loving man, worker, citizen.

"I am now able to make up for past time," he began, as they descended the balmy, bowery walk leading from Holland Park Road to Campden Hill. "In former days I used never to open a book except on Sundays. Books were my churches,

priests, and sermons; but now I lead a comparatively easy life, and am able to go to church every day."

He said this as simply and naturally as a child, and just as simple and natural was her answer.

"You are very learned, are you not? Mr. Kingsbury told me that you could read Greek and Latin—and how much more difficult that must be than French!"

Again Freeland coloured.

"I learnt a little of all these things as a boy, you must remember, Miss Helwyse, and so they are easier to me now. But learned! no, that is an epithet I do not deserve. I am ignorant enough, and so am doing my best to instruct myself."

They walked on, talking of the books he had read, the scientific discoveries he was interested in, the tracks of study he had laid out for the future, Freeland answering

her questions with uncommon clearness and precision. His language was far from ornate, on the contrary, the simplest of the simple; yet so aptly chosen were his words, so concise his phrases, that the effect produced on his hearers was that of eloquence. As a talker, he had two points in his favour: fashionable company had never infected him with mannerisms, and nature had endowed him with a singularly clear and practical intellect. He always knew exactly what he had to say, and how to say it, and he never clothed his thoughts with certain expressions because they were considered elegant.

Thus it happened that Helwyse, and not a few others of his acquaintance, were constantly going to him for information, especially on his particular subject—namely, decorative art.

"I'll ask Freeland," Mr. Kingsbury would

say, in his lofty, indolent manner, when undecided as to the pattern of a picture-frame, or the design for mosaic floor in some "interior;" and sure enough Freeland could furnish the very idea wanted.

When they reached the garden gate Helwyse said—

"It is very kind of you to take one of the boys as a pupil. Which is it to be?"

"Miss Helwyse, what a question! The youngest, of course—Master Patrice, as you call him, would be just the torment of our lives. Now, the other is a sharp, manageable lad, with a clever knack at doing things. Did you see him bring out pencil and paper, and quietly sit down and draw my cast of the Capitoline wolf, whilst his brother amused himself with making paper balls to throw at him? The younger is the lad for me."

"Ah! I am sorry! I like that gentle,

ungainly Patrice, who is so sorry when he is scolded."

"But you would not like a kitten frolicking about your studio with liquid vermillion dropping from its tail."

"No, indeed. I fear you have been a sad victim to his carelessness."

"That was a trifle, but trifles show character, and Master Patrice is like ninety-nine boys out of a hundred, playful as a kitten and mischievous as a monkey. We must have a steady boy, Miss Helwyse, or we shall never make anything out of him."

He was pleased, he hardly knew why, to be able to talk thus—we must do this, we shall never do that, and so on. In the spirit it meant nothing, yet in the letter it seemed something to make him proud and happy.

"And you will take him directly you return from Beechholme Park?"

"As soon as ever I have settled down to my winter's work in London. But he must have no absurd notions about what is or is not becoming in a gentleman, to begin with. He must not mind putting on an apron, for example."

"Of course not," Helwyse said smiling, for she had seen Mr. Freeland in an apron many and many a time, and though he wore it no longer, the insignia of labour had never seemed to her to detract from his dignity. She added, almost unconsciously,

"Have not you worn an apron?"

The speech was deliciously flattering, though carelessly uttered. Was it not as much as to say—What difference did the apron make to you? Were not you always a gentleman in the best sense of the word? What, indeed, is an apron except in the eyes of the vulgar? Thus,

at least with some natural pride and exultation, Freeland interpreted it.

He said nothing, much too proud, much too humble to say what was passing in his mind. Freeland, in one sense, was proudest of the proud, in another, humblest of the humble, and for worlds he would not have ventured upon what might have seemed an unwarrantable assumption. And he thought sadly, did not that very acceptation she despised, namely, the acceptation of the vulgar, divide them?

So when they reached the garden gate of her home, he merely took off his hat, with the usual salutation, and turned to go.

"I shall find you at Beechholme Park," she added, as she wished him good night and thanked him for his escort; and the words, so innocently uttered, lifted the veil of poetry from his spirit, leaving it to battle with stern realities as best it could.

Fate had not been kind to him, Freeland thought just then. But for so-called misfortune, he might have been invited to Beechholme Park as a guest and an equal, instead of a paid workman and, socially-speaking, an inferior. For her sweet sake, he envied Kingsbury and his fellow-artists now. Kingsbury would be placed beside Helwyse at dinner, would drive with her, walk with her, enjoy her company a dozen times a day; whilst for himself, he was regarded, if not kitchen company, at least not too good for the housekeeper's parlour.

He had been asked by his employers to take up his abode in the house, but refused, hiring lodgings in the village instead. What, indeed, had he in common with tittering ladies' maids, priggish footmen, and butlers and housekeepers, perpetually gossiping about their master's affairs? No,

such a position would be insupportable; and as he loved the country and solitude, he looked forward to the isolation of a lodging in the midst of fields and woods.

That night he proved an intractable scholar, and his French master said more than once, "Monsieur Freeland, then, is ill, or why is he so absent-minded?"

When the lesson was over, he put together a few books for his holiday reading. Would not those long Sundays in the country make his sojourn perpetual holiday to him? Two or three pocket-volumes of his favourite poets, a copy of Schiller's letters to a Danish nobleman, the Odyssey in Greek, a pastoral poet or two in Latin, and half-a-dozen works on history, art, and science made up the number. Then he set to work to arrange his rooms, so as to leave them as orderly

as possible, obliterating the traces of passing escapades in his workshop to the best of his ability, sponging the spoiled drawings with a rueful face, and locking away odds and ends of a private character.

The next morning, whilst Kingsbury's valet was brushing his clothes, cleaning his drawing-case, filling his scent-bottles, and packing up a choice assortment of light summer wearing apparel, Freeland, bag in hand, was slowly riding on the top of an omnibus to the railway station. The workman going with a slow train and third class ticket, the artist, who started from home an hour and a half later, caught him up by means of a hansom cab and an express, and the two met on the platform.

"Good day, Freeland," said Mr. Kingsbury, nodding affably. "Come and have some talk with me to-morrow about my frames, there's a good fellow."

Then he disappeared, one flunkey seizing

his bag, another his dust cloak and newspaper, a third taking possession of his portmanteau. Freeland saw the open carriage awaiting the distinguished visitor dash off in the direction of Beechholme Park; then shouldering his bag and his umbrella, set out on the hot dusty road leading to his destination. The carriage could have taken his bags the hottest and dustiest half of the way, but what proper-minded flunkeys could contaminate a patrician portmanteau with near proximity to a plebeian one? The Beechholme servants knew Freeland perfectly well, and the distance he had to walk too, but to do Kingsbury justice, he forgot all about him as soon as he had quitted the platform. He had genius, but not that rarest quality of genius that expresses itself in perpetual sympathy with its fellow-men.

Freeland, however, was not ill-pleased

with his walk, which led him first through a pretty village street, built terrace-wise, one quaint, old-world row of cottages rising above the other with hanging gardens and moss-covered walls dividing them, then gradually ascending, he had magnificent woods, dimpled hills and emerald valleys on one side, on the other, and stretching far as the eye could reach, the purple moors. There is no more beautiful scenery of the pastoral kind in the world than these Surrey hills, especially seen in autumn, when a ripple of gold spreads gradually from wood to wood, and every day brings new colours and new glories. Freeland's heart bounded as he respired the delicious air, filled his eyes with the glorious prospect, gathered the hedgerow flower, listened to the answering songs of robin or wren. He loved these landscapes all the better because he knew them

so well, hollow and glade, copse and dell, heath and lawny spaces. He thought, as he walked along in the noon-day sultriness, how grateful his Sundays would be spent, either on the breezy hills, or amid gorgeous rich gorse and heather, or in the silence of the woods; and then from those happy thoughts his mind wandered to the practical duties awaiting him, and mentally he began his work at Beechholme Park. It was a characteristic of Freeland's temperament, and, perhaps, accounted for the excellence of his work, that he was always able to isolate himself in it, to exist in it, apart from daily vexations, ailments, or hindrances. Whilst the work was there, and he had it to do, neither joy nor grief, mental distraction nor bodily discomfort, was allowed to stand between what to him was sacred and himself. Thus, though in his own mind he thought

Beechholme Park wanted no decoration; and felt sure that its owners would never care for it, except in so far as it represented other people's taste to the world, just because the decoration was entrusted to him, he meant it to be the best he could produce.

With his lodging he was well pleased. It consisted of a couple of rooms in a picturesque, tumble-down old farm-house, standing at the end of a long winding lane. There was a straggling flower-garden in front, and an orchard at the back, now brilliant with ripening pears and plums, whilst all around lay the rural features of the farm; the barnyard always alive with gabbling hens; the horse-pond, where the last brood of ducklings was learning to swim; the neat house, so busy a scene at milking-time; the turnip-house, the stables, the

pig-sheds. All these sights Freeland loved, and no less the homely music, which would now wake him in the morning: the crowing of the cock, the quacking of the ducks, the early gambols of the little pigs, the screaming of the guinea-fowls on the wall, the calling of the poultry to feed.

So he settled himself in his new quarters with a light heart, and as he had arrived a day earlier than was neccessary, gave himself up to existing enjoyment till the arrival of Helwyse.

"We can do nothing without Miss Fleming," Mr. Cornwell had said, when he presented himself at Beechholme Park next morning,—"absolutely nothing. I will let you know as soon as she comes."

Mr. Cornwell was a banker, who, as the phrase goes, ran up to town every morning, returning in time for his seven o'clock dinner. Little pleasure he could

have in these Surrey hills, and in his elegant home, everyone thought, as day after day he might be seen driving to and from the railway station, as fast as his wagonette could carry him. From the middle of August to the beginning of February the same programme was gone through—a hurried breakfast, a turn on the terrace, then a journey by express speed and hansom cab to the City—back again to the Victoria Station at five o'clock, dinner, the *Times* newspaper, port wine, a cigar, lastly tea with the ladies in the drawing-room before going to bed. Such was Mr. Cornwell's life, compared with which many a working man's might seem easy. But he was a prosperous man, he had a handsome wife, a large family of fine children, and enjoyed an excellent reputation for hospitality, liberal dealings with the poor, and art-patronage extended in the right direc-

tion. Thus, perhaps, he was in some degree compensated for the treadmill kind of life to which he had condemned himself.

A day or two passed, and no summons came, but one morning, when Freeland was beginning to tire of his enforced idleness, an idleness, moreover, which Mr. Cornwell was paying for, he was accidentally made aware of Helwyse's coming. Happening to be at the station (how often we find ourselves by chance in the place where we wish to be!) he caught sight of a face that he recognized, though where he had seen it first he could not bring to mind.

It was a girl's face, very young, very unfinished as yet, if such an expression is admissible, when regarding it from an artistic point of view. The nose was too small, the mouth was too large, the chin required more delicate moulding, whilst the abundant black hair curling about her

shoulders was as intractable as the large, ungainly figure, half-childish, half-woman-like; nevertheless it was plain that the promise of a superb woman was here, and the eyes, large, velvety, and full of expression, alone sufficed as a guarantee. Freeland, who, artist-like, never saw a striking face without analyzing it, forgot for the moment that it was Brigitte, but the girl no sooner caught sight of him than she darted forward, crying at the top of her voice, in her odd French-English,

"Hilaire, this is the Monsieur whose Minette Patrice put into the vermillion-pot."

And Hilaire, who partly for Helwyse's sake, and partly on account of a private little plot of her own, Mrs. Cornwell had also invited to Beechholme Park, trotted after, screaming excitedly,

"Oh! how is Minette, and is the red gone off her tail?"

Freeland stooped down to kiss the little cheek that was held up to him in the greatest embarrassment. Brigitte held out her hand—nay, caught hold of his arm, so great was her delight at recognising a friendly face amid the strange surroundings. Hilaire clutched his coat lappel; there was no chance of escape.

"We are going to stay here a fortnight, and Aunt Helwyse has given me her blue dress with the pretty buttons, and Hilaire will have as much new milk as he pleases," Brigitte said.

"And poor Patrice and Ambroise had to be left behind," added Hilaire; "but I shall take them home some acorns and blackberries."

Freeland, answering mechanically, glanced towards the group they had left at the end of the platform. There was Helwyse in the midst, with Mrs. Cornwell and two

of her little girls on one side, Mr. Kingsbury on the other, two or three visitors, also newly arrived, being introduced to each other, and half-a-dozen servants bustling about with the luggage. The children's sudden rush at Freeland and loud cries naturally directed attention that way. Helwyse looked after them, smiling, but vexed; Mr. Kingsbury and the rest of the party stared in unmitigated amazement, whilst the promiscuous spectators tittered. The proper-minded little Cornwells looked horrified, and even the good-natured hostess coloured with mortification. Were not the eyes of the station-master and station-mistress—that is to say, of the whole world upon them, maliciously enjoying the little scene!

What could Helwyse do? When, in answer to Freeland's respectful salutation, she merely bowed acknowledgment, it was

as much as could be reasonably expected of her; yet, because she did no more than this, he extricated himself brusquely from the children's hand-clasp, made an abrupt adieu, and hastened away, never turning his head. Brigitte and little Hilaire stood looking after him with a crestfallen air, neither the one nor the other imagining that they themselves were the cause of this strange behaviour.

"The monsieur is not so nice as I thought," Hilaire said, disconcertedly. "He couldn't be angry with us, because we did not put the kitten's tail into the vermillion-pot, you know."

"Well, dear," Brigitte answered, ever anxious to sweep away the tiniest cloud from her darling's little horizon, "he may be busy just now, and we shall see him again to-morrow."

Hilaire was not convinced.

"He looked quite glum, Brigitte; he couldn't have looked glummer if we had dipped ten pussies into his paint-pots, I am sure."

"But that may have nothing whatever to do with us, Hilaire. I look glum when I have the toothache, don't I? and people might just as well think I was not nice."

"Oh! perhaps he has the toothache, the poor monsieur—I never thought of that," the child said, quite reassured; then they were joined by the others.

Not only this, but half-a-dozen incidents on that first day of arrival at Beechholme Park, made Helwyse feel as if a bear in leading-strings would have been easier to manage than this poor, impulsive, childish Brigitte. She had not a grain of intractableness in her composition, but she was so unused to the ways of the world, so unmanageable in the matter of personal

tidiness, liberal use of strings and buttons, and other means of keeping her clothes in their proper place, so thoughtless where the opinion of others was concerned, that Helwyse had to administer a succession of mild little reproofs.

Poor Brigitte! How she rejoiced when the nursery-tea came, and the day's ordeal was over. The elder children of the house were at school. Brigitte stood in no awe of the two little over-dressed girls, who at once set her to work to dress their dolls for them, and patronizingly bestowed upon Hilarie a cupboard full of broken toys. They were good little girls enough, and the elder, the slow, heavy, plain child of the family, whose turn-up nose, red hair, and general dulness was a constant grief to both parents, soon found Brigitte quite delightful. Brigitte did not carry things with a high hand, like her pretty,

clever, much-admired sister, and Brigitte caressed and petted her as much as strangers petted the more favoured Rosie.

So when Mrs. Cornwell, magnificently dressed for dinner, in white satin and diamonds, made her appearance in the nursery, she smiled complacently at the group. There was Rosie, lording it to her heart's content over Hilaire, the two as bosom friends as bosom friends can be; and there was the oft-neglected, unattractive Janie, sitting on Brigitte's lap, listening to all kinds of new nursery rhymes. The two young sisters were speaking French, too, for Brigitte and her brothers adored French as the language of their dear early home in Gascony, and they never spoke English when French would do.

"How improving for my children!" thought Mrs. Cornwell, who, only a few

weeks back, had parted with a French nurse. "Yes, if the girl turns out a nice girl, I will at once suggest my plans."

After two or three days, Brigitte settled down without any more ado. She still gave Helwyse a pang of terror now and then with regard to punctuality at meals, proper Sunday behaviour—for at Beechholme Park Sunday was rigorously observed—and personal appearance, but that was all; though the tallest person of her own sex in the house, only wanting long dresses and correct hair-dressing to look presentable at balls, she persistently kept to the nursery, not even venturing down to what Mrs. Cornwell called a family dinner-party, for Brigitte avoided the drawing-room as if it were a plague-stricken place, and could not even be persuaded to go down to dinner with Rosie and Janie. In the nursery she was happy, and in the

nursery she stayed, taking long rambles with Hilaire, when the little girls were riding with the groom, fleeing down a side alley of the park if she caught sight of her fellow-visitors, enjoying the daisies and buttercups and blackberries for the first time in her young life without a care.

CHAPTER VII.

"BENEATH THE SPREADING OAK."

THE rich, warm sunshine of the late September afternoon steeped glen and hollow in Beechholme Park with golden light, whilst far around moor and wood and hills lay bathed in yet mellower effulgence. It was still too warm for rambling in the woods, and the very best hour of the day for sketching, so Helwyse and one or two fellow-guests had brought out their sketch-books, and were leisurely working under the trees. It was a lovely bit of woodland scenery they had chosen as a subject—large, majestic oaks, in the

fulness, yet not decay, of years, a vista of purple under the lower branches, and lawny glades of ripest gold stretching beneath. This was all; yet what landscape artist wants more for a summer picture?

Kingsbury, who was a prince among painters, had brought his easel, or rather the Beechholme servants had brought it for him, and with true artistic fervour was revelling in the delicious light and shadow of the nearer boughs, where patines of bright gold lay motionless upon the almost violet sombreness of the under-leaves. Helwyse, who always felt herself the humblest of the humble in the presence of her master—for so indeed, artistically speaking, she regarded him—contented herself with sketching a magnificent group of white fox-gloves, rising like a procession of fairy princesses from a mossy bank close by.

Idly stretched on the turf, with a volume

of Shelley, from which he occasionally read extracts, was a third guest-friend, Hubert Papillon by name, who may be described as one of those men who have written a successful play and novel, are always travelling, speak many languages, and never grow old. Mr. Papillon was, in fact, clever, and being rich, and a bachelor, and without any more notions of politics, or what are called social obligations, than a well-trained singing-bird, gave up his time, his talents, and his money to the cultivation of that cleverness which so astonished his friends. He came of three stocks—French, English, and Wallachian, which, perhaps, accounted for seeming contradictions in his temperament. He was a good fellow, yet in some senses a Bohemian; and though perpetually changing his tastes and hobbies, he never so far changed as to lose the character of a chivalrous English gentleman.

Thus much for Hubert Papillon, and of Mrs. Cornwell, who, engaged in some elegant needlework for a bazaar, made up the group, it is unnecessary to say anything.

"I have arranged all the tableaux vivants for your party to-morrow, Mrs. Cornwell," said Papillon, disgusted at having read a sonnet to which nobody paid any attention.—What a bore these artists are when out sketching!—he thought to himself;—and they are always at it!—He added aloud—"But we must have Miss Clifford for the Jephthah's daughter."

"Well," Mrs. Cornwell answered, good-naturedly, "I have telegraphed as you told me to do. 'Your eyes indispensable to-morrow for Jephthah's daughter.' If she does not benevolently come after that appeal, nothing but her own inclination will bring her."

"That's the worst of it," Papillon said, impatiently. "A woman famous for her eyes is good for nothing. Miss Clifford is —I won't say downright ugly—but you know well enough, were it not for those magnificent eyes, she would never so much as be looked at. Oh, I hate you all, you handsome women!" he added, glaring maliciously at his hostess and lovely guest-friend.

"Come, Papillon, that is quite intemperate language, you know," Kingsbury said.

"I am sure I beg Mrs. Cornwell's and Miss Fleming's humble pardon," he said, with affected meekness. "But you must confess, Kingsbury, I am greatly to be pitied. Mine is a hard case. I have spent days upon these tableaux vivants, in order to give general pleasure and satisfaction, and at the last moment Miss Clifford writes

that she can't conveniently arrive till next week, thus upsetting all my arrangements."

"Yes, I am sure you have been most kind about it. And the dresses you brought with you! Why, the railway people must have taken you for a stage-manager," Mrs. Cornwell put in, consolingly.

"Thank you for your sympathy. I am only sorry things have turned out so unfortunately. The Jephthah's daughter was to have been the crowning achievement; and now it must either collapse altogether, or be a frightful fiasco."

"The Cordelia will console us for everything," Kingsbury said, looking at Helwyse for the smile and the blush, which did not, however, come. Helwyse was so absorbed in her white fox-gloves at that moment, that this allusion to her appearance as Cordelia passed unnoticed.

Just then there was a rush of young

feet on the turf, and a wild, radiant figure, gipsy, child, and woman all in one, stood before them. It was Brigitte, who, in her broad-brimmed straw hat and brown holland pinafore-like dress, looked as dishevelled, untidy, and Bohemian as could be well imagined. That long, curly, black hair of hers had never surely seemed so intractable before, whilst her garments, from which the sash had dropped in her play—poor Brigitte who was always losing some part of her dress or other, and being scolded in consequence!—fell to her feet in folds as unfashionable as those of a Greek statue. But two or three days of out-of-door life and perfect happiness had wonderfully embellished the girl, and as she stood there, holding out a letter to Mrs. Cornwell, all eagerness and expectation, she looked quite handsome. "What could not be made of the child with stays, crinolines, and dress-

improvers," thought Mrs. Cornwell, whilst the others found in the very absence of these abominations something indescribably picturesque and noble.

"Oh! madame," Brigitte cried, speaking French as she always did when eager, "here is a telegram for you—and may Hilaire and I go with Mr. Freeland to see the young owl's nest at Hollow Farm? Rosie and Janie are out riding, and we will promise to be back before dusk."

Mrs. Cornwell looked at Helwyse. Helwyse smiled assentingly, so the permission was accorded. For Rosie and Janie to have accepted such an invitation would have been out of the question, of course, but with regard to Brigitte and Hilaire it was quite another matter. So the delighted Brigitte rushed off, afraid to inperil the permission by a moment's delay. Before Papillon had time to inquire the meaning

of such an apparition, for he had lunched out every day since his arrival, and had, therefore, not encountered Helwyse's young charges, Mrs. Cornwell read aloud with dismay,

"From Edith Clifford to Mrs. Cornwell.—Impossible to leave so soon. A thousand regrets."

"I have thought of something," cried Papillon, springing from the ground and pointing in the direction Brigitte had taken. "There is Jephthah's daughter, my dear friends. We might search the United Kingdom in vain to find a better. Edith Clifford is all very well, but Edith Clifford is a fashionable young lady. This girl, whoever she may be, is superb, and have her we must."

"My poor Brigitte!" Helwyse said, smiling almost incredulously. "I have hardly thought of her looks at all."

"Who and what is she?—a *protegée*, a nursery-maid, a Sunday-school monitor? I am dying to know."

Whereupon Helwyse, who had known Papillon for several years, told the story of the orphan's arrival with mingled humour and pathos.

"What a romantic history!" said Kingsbury; adding, with a little shrug of the shoulders, "thank Heaven I have no nephews or nieces who can thus surprise me, for, mingled with the pleasure, must have been a little dismay at such an invasion."

"And think of Miss Fleming adopting one—and a boy—a boy!" Mrs. Cornwell said, looking horrified.

"You don't mean to say you entertain such an idea?" said the artist, turning to Helwyse with mingled admiration and disapproval. "It is generous, but under

the circumstances, Quixotic. You will endanger your art-career. You will hamper yourself in a hundred ways. You will no longer be your own mistress."

"That is what I say," Mrs. Cornwell, added. "Her heart and soul are now in her work, and that is why she does it so well. But when she has a boy to look after—" and the word was pronounced as emphatically as if it had been an anacondah or rhinoceros, or some other dreadful creature—"when she has a boy to look after and mend for and scold, and take to church on Sundays, and buy quartern loaves for every day, either Miss Fleming will get ill, or Miss Fleming's pictures will cease to be hung."

"What worldly nonsense you are both talking! Excuse me, my dear Mrs. Cornwell, for the language, but really I am amazed," said Papillon, with indolent in-

dignation. "Are, then, natural affection and Christian charity to be banished from the world, lest there should be one picture painted or one book written the less? I honour Miss Helwyse for her resolve, and I will take the monster you speak of to the Zoological Gardens every Sunday—provided his aunt goes too."

"That is a poor display of the Christian charity you spoke of just now," Kingsbury said. "I speak solely as an artist, and as from time to time Miss Fleming does me the honour to ask my opinion, I venture upon offering a word or two of friendly advice now."

"Which she won't take, I'm sure. But God knows what a god-send is this Miss Brigitte to me! The very best Jephthah's daughter in the world dropped from the clouds! You will manage the business for me, will you not, Miss Fleming?"

"I will try; but Brigitte is not easy to be persuaded."

"Bribe her with something pretty—coax her, only gain her consent somehow, and I shall be eternally grateful. I have set my heart upon the matter, you see, and Mrs. Cornwell also."

"I have found out the way to win Brigitte's affections, and if everything else fails, will see what I can do," Mrs. Cornwell said. "She is so devoted to her little brother, that to please him she would figure as Jephthah's daughter before all London."

"Bravo!" Papillon cried, delightedly.

"Tell Brigitte that, if she consents, Hilaire shall sit up to see the piece, and all four shall have supper after in the nursery, and crackers."

"Ah! I should never have thought of that. Dear Mrs. Cornwell, how kind of

you! I am sure Brigitte will do all that is asked of her," Helwyse answered; then the conversation dropped into another channel.

By-and-by tea was brought out, after which Mrs. Cornwell rose, saying that it was time for her to fetch her husband from the station. Helwyse also put up her painting things, and leaving the two men still under the oak-trees, she set off to meet the children alone.

A little cloud was on her face, and a little weight lay on her heart, she hardly knew why. Was it because she saw that her oracle disapproved of this resolve to help poor Bryan? Did he see in her conduct a falling off from those precepts he had so long and so earnestly inculcated, namely, that the life devoted to art must be single-purposed, self-sacrificing, consecrated as the

life of the Hebrew Samuel or the Greek Ion within the walls of the temple? Did he regard her determination not only as a piece of Quixotism, but as a swerving from the high allegiance she had sworn to from her childhood upwards? Or, if none of these thoughts were in his mind, why had his voice been so suddenly cold, his face so unsympathetic?

Poor Helwyse began to feel for the first time that life was growing a problem and a perplexity. She must stand by Bryan, yet there was nothing in the world so sweet to her as Kingsbury's praises. He stood out from the crowd of her fellow-artists as a grand, mediæval, wonderfully-endowed genius, whose lightest approval was a guarantee of future fame, whose merest criticism was a lesson to be pondered over for years. How kind, and good, and helpful a friend he had been to

her from the very beginning of her artistic career! She could not endure the thought of disappointing him now.

Thinking these thoughts as she walked pensively through the dusky lanes, she suddenly heard merry young voices, and came upon the three all at once, Freeland in the midst, Brigitte clinging to his arm, Hilaire holding him by the hand. A kind of paternal tenderness had been developed in Freeland's nature long ago, when yet a mere boy he had found himself the natural protector of helpless little sisters; and it was renewed now.

"Oh! auntie," cried Hilaire, ecstatically, "we have had such a treat! Mr. Freeland put up a swing for us, and gave us harvest cake, and I took one of the little owls in my arms, I did."

"Such queer things, as prickly as porcupines, and with such eyes and mouths!"

Brigitte added, laughingly trying to extend her own sufficiently by way of imitation. "You must see them, auntie."

Helwyse, having greeted Freeland, gave her hand to Hilaire, and the four walked in a friendly line homewards. After that vexatious encounter at the station, Freeland had taken refuge in the coldest, most business-like behaviour, and it had been easy to keep this up, so long as they were in Mrs. Cornwell's boudoir, with workmen standing by, and a hundred things to be thought of during the interview. But now, when the children had again brought them together in this easy, natural way, aud they were walking side by side amid delicious woods, and under a purpling sky, with pale stars trembling through a primrose cloud, and an ineffable peace and sweetness around and above them, all his old craving for equality came back. He

craved an equality that should be recognised by the world, as well as by Helwyse's own heart, an equality incontestable, guaranteed, permanent.

But he felt joyous, and when Helwyse, having heard much more about the young owls, expressed a wish to see them, he said eagerly,

"Will you come and see them, then, to-morrow afternoon, Miss Helwyse? I shall be back to tea at six o'clock——"

"And will you give Aunt Helwyse tea and harvest cake, too, and show her everything?" Hilaire said.

"Not to-morrow, thank you. It is Mrs. Cornwell's party, you know, and I have promised to help in the preparations. But may I come the next day? and I think Mr. Kingsbury would like to come, too; perhaps we could sketch the young owls in their nest," Helwyse added, not noticing with

how little alacrity Freeland assented this time.

Then they talked of birds and their ways, Freeland bestowing information abundantly, and able to answer all the questions put to him. Helwyse, artist-like, ever pondering over some fresh idea, always found here a ready fund of knowledge and suggestions. Freeland could tell her where to go for exactly the bit of forest scenery she wanted, could accurately describe this bird and that, could imitate every woodland note, and knew the names of every wild flower, shrub, or tree that grew thereabouts. So they talked eagerly till they reached the park-gates.

There his ease and gaiety forsook him. The stately, brand-new iron gates of Beechholme Park were like barriers shutting him out of Paradise, in other words, from the world in which Helwyse moved,

as lovely and as much removed from him as the star shining so radiantly over their heads.

He was about to turn back after a formal greeting, when Hilaire threw up his arms, imperatively demanding a kiss, and Brigitte held out her hand with a friendly good-bye.

"Dear Mr. Freeland, may we come and see you again soon?" said Hilaire, whilst Brigitte echoed the wish in other words.

How could Helwyse hold back? She also advanced with outstretched hands and said in the friendliest tones,

"Thank you very much for being so good to the children, Mr. Freeland. I will not fail to be at Hollow Farm the day after to-morrow at six o'clock."

Then they separated; Helwyse to hasten indoors and make the speediest possible toilette with Brigitte's help, Hilaire

looking on; Freeland to stroll homewards in the heavy, silent sweetness of the twilight, looking back more than once at the brilliantly lighted mansion he had left behind.

CHAPTER VIII.

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER.

MRS. CORNWELL never omitted the reading of nursery prayers, which she did in a lively, unsentimental way, making them as interesting as story-books. She had not a grain of sentimentality in her composition; so when she sat down at the head of the table in a pretty, bright-coloured morning dress, with a pleasant smile on her handsome face, you might be sure there would follow no lachrymose dissertations on juvenile sinners and saints, and their treatment

in the world to come. She instead would read the story of Joseph and his brethren, and of Miriam and the infant Moses, much as if they were incidents of ordinary daily life, leaving her young hearers to draw the moral for themselves. To-day, being entirely pre-occupied with her party, and wishing to set Papillon's mind at ease about the tableaux vivants without delay, she read the narrative of Jephthah's daughter. When the reading was over and she had kissed them all before descending to breakfast, she said, certainly with a Macchiavellian insight into the real state of affairs—

"I have such a treat in store for you all to-night, provided Brigitte will do something for me. You are to sit up till ten o'clock to see the company and the charades, and have supper afterwards and

crackers and a camellia each to wear!"

"Oh!" was the universal cry of ecstasy. Then in a brief, innocent way, as if she were merely asking her to shut the door, Mrs. Cornwell mooted the subject of Jephthah's daughter.

Brigitte, of course, was trapped. The idea of appearing before Mrs. Cornwell's guests was simply dreadful to her. She felt afraid of breaking down, but to break down a dozen times were nothing in comparison to Hilaire's disappointment. She consented with a dismayed face, and, as soon as breakfast was over, retired to her favourite seat in the bay window, with the Bible in her hands. She said to herself that the thing must be done well, since she had promised to do it. Would not failure be not only ungrateful, but unfair? Her kind friend's share of the compact would be abundantly fulfilled, she knew that, and

how much was she indebted to her already! Never before had Hilaire looked so strong and rosy, whilst every day in this enchanted place was health-giving and blissful to him. She must, she would succeed for conscience and Mrs. Cornwell's sake.

So, perched on the broad window-sill behind a red curtain, her long limbs drawn up under her, her arms folded behind her head, the open Bible on her knees, she sat conning the story of the heroic Hebrew maiden.

It was new to Brigitte, for she had not been brought up to read the Bible among her Catholic relations, and as she read, and re-read, she seemed farther off than ever from arriving at a satisfactory interpretation. When, an hour after, Helwyse entered, she rose and said, putting down the book in despair,

"Aunt Helwyse, I do not in the least

know how I shall do it. You see, I don't understand the story. If Jephthah had been my father I should have so hated him for his cruelty that I am sure I should have escaped from the mountains."

"There is another way of looking at it," Helwyse said. "Suppose you had not been the first of his children to meet Jephthah, but there were several, and the one to be sacrificed was a little sister or brother you loved very much, would you not at once have consented to die in that one's place?"

"Oh, yes! if it were Hilaire," Brigitte answered, a gleam of indescribable love and devotion lighting up her dark eyes. "I see what you mean, Aunt Helwyse. I think I can do it now. I will alter the story in my own mind; I will fancy myself about to die, not for the sake of a cruel father, but for a little brother like Hilaire.

That would not be so very hard, I think."

"Well, come with me to try on the dresses," Helwyse answered cheerfully. "You need not think any more of the piece now, I am sure."

"But I *must* think about it, Aunt Helwyse. You see, there will be so many people to look on, and if I do not do my part, I shall feel that I have cheated Mrs. Cornwell."

It was not without much persuasion that the girl could be induced to leave her solitary corner in the window; but when she found herself among the gorgeous dresses that Papillon displayed in order to dazzle her, she forgot all about the little brother and the sacrifice. With half childish, half womanly delight, and a coquetry now brought into play for the first time, she allowed herself to be attired in one magnificent dress after the

other. Papillon was enraptured with his new acquisition. Her wild, black hair, large yet not ungraceful limbs, mobile features, and fine eyes, charmed him as much as her almost infantine naïveté and childishness. She was still, in fact, a mere child, all precocity had been the development of suffering and self-sacrifice; and beneath this gravity and sedateness beyond her years lay a capacity for joyousness and enthusiasm new even to herself.

Two or three other guests had arrived that morning, and much time was occupied in arranging the various tableaux to Papillon's satisfaction. Brigitte's impersonation alone pleased him. Helwyse made a charming Cordelia, Kingsbury a noble Caractacus, but a Cordelia and a Caractacus a little too like Helwyse and Kingsbury. Brigitte, and Brigitte only,

seemed to grow into the rôle, and leave her former self behind.

"My dear little girl," Papillon said. Brigitte was almost as big as himself, but being double her years, he felt privileged to use such language. "Only do as well to-night as you are doing now, and to-morrow I will give you anything you ask of me."

"Will you hold Hilaire on Rosie's pony while he trots round the lawn?" she asked.

"That is no favour. The grooms are there on purpose to do it. No; ask for something you can see and hold in your hands," answered Papillon, who was indolent in hot weather.

"Well, will you climb to the top of the big fir tree at the end of the plantation, and fetch me one of the young squirrels?"

"The squirrel would bite and scratch you," Papillon said, with another wry

face. "You shall have bonbons instead."

"I want nothing; I was only teazing," Brigitte answered, laughing gaily. Then she returned to the nursery to tell Hilaire of all the wonderful things he was to see, and to amuse all three children till evening came. Even the nurse was busy below, and Brigitte was the best nursemaid in the world, full of resources and possessed of indefatigable patience. Mrs. Cornwell congratulated herself more than once that day upon the piece of benevolence which had turned out so well.

The company was a superb one, and the festive appearance of Beechholme Park seemed fairyland to Brigitte and Hilaire. It was the first splendour they had seen, and Hilaire quite made up his mind that a mine of gold lay somewhere in Mrs. Cornwell's estate, only waiting to be coined when the owner wanted it. The four children

stood on the stairs to see the visitors pass into the dining-room, Hilaire, with the utmost difficulty, being prevented from clapping his hands at the sight of Mrs. Cornwell's pink satin and diamonds.

Neither children nor guests observed another spectator of the scene, who, happening at that moment to be crossing the hall, paused for a moment in the shadow of a vestibule till the procession passed by. It was Freeland. There were several finishing touches to be put to the temporary theatre at the eleventh hour, and when Papillon had quitted him an hour before it was with the anxiously-uttered injunction—

"Mind, Freeland, I rely on you to have everything in order."

So, with hammer in hand, he had altered a curtain here, put up a few lights there, re-arranged decorations, just accomplish-

ing the last stroke as the dinner was announced.

Though wholly unobserved, he was so near the marshalled guests that her dress touched him as she passed by—for of course he had no eyes but for Helwyse. How lovely she looked, he thought, and how perfectly she was dressed, though by far the simplest of all! That white robe so graceful and artless that it might have been worn by an Arcadian shepherdess on May Day, whilst with the sweet smelling, creamy blossomed stephanotis blossoms in her hair and on her bosom, she looked the very personification of sweetness and spring-like innocence.

Helwyse was young enough and fair enough to want no other splendours, but you may be sure that in the eyes of the world, that is to say, of Mrs. Cornwell's lady friends and women servants,

she was far from faultlessly attired.

Freeland watched her till she disappeared amid the gay silks, feathers, and glittering jewellery of the rest; then fetching his hat, precipitately left the house. He had been invited, nay, cordially pressed to stay and see the evening's entertainment, but refused, knowing well what such an invitation meant. There would be a champagne supper in the housekeeper's room, with simpering ladies' maids in rustling black silks, and supercilious butler and upper footmen, all epicurean in their eating and sparse of Christian charity in their tittle-tattle. Can we expect a corn crop when we have planted tares, or look for sweet apples on a crab tree? Our servants are as Vanity Fair—not as God made them.

Freeland walked across the park in the lovely summer starlight, not repiningly,

only a little out of heart, and it must be admitted, out of temper. He felt a childish longing to behold Helwyse as Cordelia, and it seemed hard that after having toiled all day at the preparations, he should not be rewarded by a glimpse of her there. It was all very well for Mrs. Cornwell to say—"Pray don't go home, Freeland. Mrs. Beech will take care of you, and I am sure a glass of good champagne will do you good." Mrs. Cornwell must know that he had nothing in common with Mrs. Beech and her friends of the upper kitchen.

But his position only seemed anomalous for Helwyse's sake. He would battle with his folly, and so master it that it should never torment him again. After all, were they not good friends, and was she not always sweet and good to him, and glad to be in his company? He must be satisfied with this, and when the boy was

under his care, there would be countless opportunities for seeing her oftener still. He sat down to his solitary tea thus with no uncheerful air, lighted his reading lamp, and after three hours' hard study, retired to rest whilst Beechholme Park was still blazing with lights.

Meanwhile Brigitte, who had been thinking of nothing but Jephthah's daughter during the nursery tea, descended to the dressing-room, passionately longing to do her part well for Hilaire's sake. When the last touch was put to her toilette by Helwyse, and the curtain was about to be drawn up, she sighed, or rather breathed, a little prayer, and from that moment, till it dropped again, so identified herself with the scene that she almost believed it was real. Hers was indeed a glorious impersonation, and alike pose, attitude, and expres-

sion were of her own choosing. No one had said to her, you must try to look thus, hold your arms that way, kneel thus —she had thought of everything herself, and seeing the sudden imaginativeness and power the occasion had called forth in this apparently common-place young girl, Papillon delightedly let her have her way. There was a round of applause when the curtain dropped, and Brigitte was called for again and again, but Brigitte had fled. After a vain search for her elsewhere, she was found in the nursery, with Hilaire on her knees, Hilaire's little arms round her neck, his applause being all she wanted. She had changed her dress, and the sudden transformation was wonderful, the rapt, passionate, heroic woman of a few minutes ago being again a mere child, living in the world of childhood only.

"You must really come downstairs,"

Papillon said, "there are so many people waiting to be introduced to you. You were splendid, my dear child."

"What nonsense—isn't it, Hilaire?" Brigitte said; "and we won't go downstairs, will we, Hilaire? No, we will stay up here and enjoy our crackers in peace."

"Oh! will you be so unkind, Miss Brigitte?"

"It is not unkind at all, and you know it is not. Nobody wants me so much as Rosie, and Janie, and Hilaire; and please don't stay any longer, Mr. Papillon, because we want to begin our supper."

Papillon went away laughing, and repeated the story in the drawing-room, of course making the best of it, for to him this naïve, brilliant, unformed half-French, half-Irish girl was the one novelty and charm in a society to him dull, flat, stale, and unprofitable. He acknowledged that

Helwyse was sweet to look at and sweet to listen to, but Helwyse, fresh and unworldly as she was, had none of Brigitte's delicious frankness, untameableness, wildness —he knew not by what name to call it. And then, to his thinking, Brigitte possessed beauty—as yet unfinished and undeveloped, but beauty still—of a rarer kind than Helwyse. Those clouds of curly black hair, those violet Irish eyes, so deep, so passionate, so indescribable; those large grand features, that would tone down into symmetry by-and-by, entrapped his fancy and exercised his imagination. The girl was a riddle, a romance, a speculation, and he had arrived at an age when to be thus interested and perplexed was a novel and acceptable sensation to him.

Brigitte, quite unconscious of the curiosity she had aroused, was making a

hearty supper with her young companions, telling stories, singing songs, playing the mimic, doing a hundred things to make them merry. Then, when the meal was over, the crackers were pulled, and it was time for the little people to go to bed, as no nursemaid appeared, she performed the business of undressing and washing, finally retiring herself. When, at midnight, Mrs. Cornwell came for a final glance round, she found all darkness and silence. The children's clothes were neatly folded and put away, the little girls cosily tucked up in their cribs, and Hilaire sleeping softly by Brigitte's side.

"That girl is worth her weight in gold," thought Mrs. Cornwell. "But for her, Rosie and Janie would have been sadly in the way to-day."

And the next morning the following conversation took place between host and

hostess before they descended to the breakfast-table—

"You are quite sure, my dear, that you have no objection to the plan?" said Mrs. Cornwell.

"What possible objection can I have? If the girl is a nice girl, and if Rosie and Janie are fond of her, there is nothing to say."

"And of course it is a great advantage to the children to be speaking French perpetually. It is as good as keeping a French maid for them."

"Much better, I should say."

"And I am sure it will be a comfort to dear Helwyse to have one of the four orphans provided for, even for a time. Besides, I shall let Brigitte have music lessons, and other advantages."

"Of course—of course."

"Then it is settled. I wish another

matter seemed as likely to be settled too."

"And what is that?"

"I am losing patience with Mr. Kingsbury. It is now five years since he and Helwyse have been thrown together. Surely it is high time for him to speak out, if he wishes to marry her."

"My good Rose, why do you want Miss Fleming to marry anyone? She is happy enough. She has plenty of friends, and is in a fair way to make her fortune. Let her be."

"But Mr. Kingsbury has really behaved to her more like a lover than anything else."

"Well, he is going away to-day, isn't he? So you will not be annoyed any more by witnessing his attentions."

"But that is just the trouble. Mr. Kingsbury has been here for several days. I have given him every opportunity of

seeing Helwyse. If he goes away without speaking to her, I shall set him down as a trifler."

"I daresay he is no more a trifler than most men. If he saw another man likely to carry off the prize, he would at once enter the lists, and try to carry it off himself. That is how marriages are made, my dear."

"Then I hope Helwyse will not think of him at all, and marry some one else."

"I hope she will remain as she is, and go on painting her pretty pictures. But make haste, Rosie. We must really cut down prayers to seven minutes and a half—for a second Psalm always deprives me of my third bit of toast."

Then the usual dressing-room dialogue closed, and Mr. Cornwell descended to take the five minutes' turn in the lawn, which constituted his sole enjoyment of

the magnificent standard-roses and sylvan scenery, cultivated so assiduously. Prayers and breakfast followed, both being got through at a rapid pace, after which the brougham drove up with automatic punctuality, and he was driven to the station just in time to catch the express.

Poor Mr. Cornwell! The village children plucked blackberries and sweetbrier from his hedges; the gipsy or vagrant encamped in cosy little enclosures off his waste lands; the schoolboys for miles round went nutting in his woods or fishing in his brooks; the stray London artist or artizan rejoiced in the beauty of his domains, alike in springtide and autumn, haymaking and harvest; but scant possession, in the spiritual sense of the word, could the owner be said to have of all these.

The primroses might star the mossy ground with gold, or the hyacinth spread an

azure cloud over dell and glade; the skylark might pierce the blue vault of Heaven in its arrowy flight, filling it with joyful song; the yellow hillsides might be flecked with large purple shadows in harvest-time; the woods change to purple and crimson, and the lonely robins sing to each other from barren hedges, all these eye-rejoicing, heart-stirring sights and sounds were lost to the rich governor of Beechholme Park as he sat in his dreary counting-house from morning till night.

What an irony of fate is this so-called good fortune sometimes! Mr. Cornwell was always saying to himself, "I am a prosperous man, thank God, and when I have worked a few years longer, I shall retire from business and enjoy a country life." But could he enjoy it as he fondly imagined he should do? Would not so many long years of indefatigable money-

making wear off the keen edges of those sensibilities, by virtue of which a man is capable of enjoying good and lovely things? In vain the wild flowers bloom for us, the birds pipe for us, the poets sing to us, if we have refused to gaze on them and hearken to them in our youth!

CHAPTER IX.

BRIGITTE LISTENS TO PROPOSALS.

THE next morning, by way of rewarding Brigitte for her amiable behaviour, Mrs. Cornwell took her into the library and made those tempting proposals we have already heard of. A year at Beechholme Park, a pony to ride, music lessons, new dresses, and a trip to London every now and then, surely here was as bright a prospect as the heart of any young girl could desire! But Brigitte listened coldly, and answered, without hesitation. She did not care about all these things, she said, and nothing would induce

her to leave Hilaire even for a year.

Then Mrs. Cornwell tried motherly remonstrance and a little gentle moralizing. Was not Brigitte carrying sisterly attachment too far? If Hilaire were old enough to reason with her on the subject, would he not urge her to accept such an offer? Would it not indeed be selfish of him to do otherwise? And Hilaire was not the only person to consult—there was her uncle Bryan and his young family. Had Brigitte thought of them? she said kindly, but with a slight shade of reproach.

"You must consider," she added, "that it would be greatly to Hilaire's advantage to do as I ask you. The money your uncle Bryan must meantime necessarily spend on you, might be spent on Hilaire. You say he is delicate, he needs then all the more care and comfort——"

"That is just why I cannot leave him,"

Brigitte said. "He is almost always ailing, but when I am with him, he forgets all about it. I amuse him in a dozen different ways, and I am sure no one else would do it."

"Of course you must do as you please, but there is yet another consideration. If you get a good education yourself—which it seems your uncle Bryan cannot afford to give—you would be enabled later to maintain Hilaire, or at least to give him the comforts he requires. You could earn money and spend it upon him."

Brigitte reflected for a little.

"I can do that by-and-by," she said, in the same tones of quiet decision. "I shall better be able to leave him when he is older and stronger; and then I do not mind where I go or what I do in order to help poor Uncle Bryan. It is not myself I care about," she added, with tears in her

eyes, and a quivering of the under-lip. "I could bear to be parted from him, of course, if I made up my mind to it; but I could not bear to have him unhappy. It would break my heart."

"You are a good girl, Brigitte, and I am sure no one can blame you for such devotion. But, my dear, children do very quickly forget things."

"Mrs. Cornwell, don't ask me to do it. He could never forget me. No one loves him as I do," the girl said, bursting into tears, and of course her friend ceased to persuade. Perhaps Brigitte would have opportunities of learning at home—she was still young, and must make up for lost time, and so on.

But hardly were Brigitte's tears dried, and her misgivings set at ease, when a fresh trial awaited her. Mrs. Cornwell having given her a basket of flowers to

arrange, left her alone in the library, where, half an hour later, Papillon found her, humming to herself not over cheerfully.

"And what are you thinking of?" he asked, as he entered the room, and sat down to watch her at work. Two vases had been already filled, but a heap of roses and lilies still lay on the table, Brigitte handling them as lovingly as if they were human beings. She had stuck a splendid crimson flower in her hair, another in her bosom, and in her dark blue cotton dress, with its long straight skirt and loose hanging sleeves, might have been taken for an Eastern flower-girl. The picture struck Papillon's fancy, and bringing out pencil and sketch-book, he began to draw it while they talked.

"I was thinking," she said, quite innocently, "that I wish I could earn some money."

"And what would you do with it?"

"Oh! so many things. I should first of all buy Hilaire a little blue coat with silver buttons; then I should spend a pound or two on learning to read and write; and the rest, of course, I should give Uncle Bryan."

He laughed heartily.

"Are you such a terrible ignoramus as not to know how to read or write? I am not clever, but perhaps I could teach you so much."

"I mean English," Brigitte answered, pettishly. "How could I learn English properly when there was no one to teach me? I can read and write French, of course. But arithmetic, now. Can you do sums?"

"Quite easy ones," answered the young man, still laughing.

"Oh! will you teach me? You see, if

I could do sums, and play on the piano, perhaps Uncle Bryan would let me keep a little school. I will act Jephthah's daughter for you as often as you like if you will teach me to do sums."

"Well, when you have arranged your flowers, if you fetch a slate and pencil, we will begin at once; and if you are tractable, you shall have a lesson every day."

She made such haste to finish her task that it was done long before his own. Holding up the sheet he said,

"Come, as you and I are making bargains, let us come to terms about this portrait. If you will sit patiently till it is done—in water-colours—you shall have a little blue coat for Hilaire."

"No, I won't have it, but I will sit for the portrait. Hilaire can do without the little blue coat, and if I learn to do sums,

I shall be able to buy him one before long with my own money."

"I think I can put you in a better way of earning money than by keeping a school," Papillon said, putting down his sketch-book. "Put on your hat, there is a good little girl, and come out of doors with me. I want to have a long talk with you."

Brigitte put on her broad-brimmed straw hat delightedly, and taking his hand, the two set out for a stroll. She liked Papillon better than any of her new friends at Beechholme Park, firstly, because he was half French and always spoke the language of her beloved France; secondly, because, without taking much trouble about Hilaire, he was kind to him in many ways, giving him birds' eggs and bonbons, and buying him toys whenever he drove to Guildford.

So, hand-in-hand, they took a shady side path that led down to the road, and crossing it, were soon on the ridge of a wide-stretching moor, glorious with heath and gorse in full bloom. Only the lightest cumuli, downy white and feathery, floated across the clear blue sky, whilst not a sound broke the stillness of the gold and purple wilderness around. It was an exhilarating landscape, yet not wanting in wildness, all the dimpling greenness and softness of the hills and valleys below being lost to sight. Far as the eye could reach lay heath and brushwood, no smoke of shepherd's hut curling upwards from the brown expanse, no spire or chimney top breaking the monotony of the horizon. It was difficult to believe that a scene so romantic and so solitary could be within little more than an hour's journey of London; yet so it was, and a brisk descent of

two miles would take the pedestrian to the smiling village and bustling railway-station the Cornwell household visited so often. The two sat down on the borders of this magnificent prospect, undulating sweeps of brightest gold and purple stretching beneath a turquoise sky, and Papillon said,

"Is not this a beautiful place, Brigitte? Is it not a pleasant thing to be rich, and to be able to choose such beautiful places to live in?"

"I have never thought about it. Why should I? If I were rich, I should live in my dear France. Ah! you should see Grenoble!" she said.

"Well, you would like to have money to travel in France sometimes, would you not?"

"Yes," she answered, with a sudden cloud on her young face, thinking of the

neglected graves in Dauphiné. "I should like to go to Grenoble once a year and put immortelles on papa's and mamma's graves."

"But there is no reason why you should not do all these things by-and-by—at least, if you will be guided by me," he went on, warily; "you could help your uncle Bryan, you could do something for your elder brothers, you could buy little Hilaire everything he wants—even goat's milk—if you would follow my advice."

"Do tell me what I am to do," she cried, flushing with expectation. "I am sure Hilaire would get quite fat, if he had goat's milk all the year round, and everything that fattens people is so dear in London, Aunt Emmie says. Oh, what have you thought of for me, Mr. Papillon?"

"It is a serious matter, and you must

consider before making a decision; but it is just such a proposal as I should make to my sister, if I had a young sister like you, and we were both poor and wanted to make our fortunes. I have thought it over very carefully, and if you consent, I will help you by every means in my power, and stand by you as long as I live."

"Oh! what is it?"

"Tell me first, have you ever tried your hand at acting? You must have helped in charades and that sort of thing sometimes?"

"Of course, in our play."

"And are you afraid of reading aloud or speaking before large numbers of people? For instance, supposing as Jephthah's daughter, you had a long speech to make, could you do it, do you think?"

"I would try. I think I could. I am not afraid of anything sometimes—I mean,

if I thought I were earning money for my poor boys, I am sure I should never remember if people were looking at me or not. I forgot all about it last night. I quite fancied myself Jephthah's daughter, only it was in Hilaire's place that I was to be offered up as a sacrifice."

Papillon watched her animated face delightedly.

"You are a splendid little girl," he said; "and now listen to me. I believe that you possess a talent of an uncommon order, Brigitte, a talent for acting, I mean. I feel sure, from the way in which you performed your part last night, that if you were properly trained, either as an actress or dramatic reader, you might win both fame and fortune. But it would take years to attain perfection in this art, even with the most brilliant talents in the world."

"Who would train me?" Brigitte asked,

looking sadly disappointed. "And Hilaire could not stay with me, I suppose. Is that all?"

"Don't be too much in a hurry to draw conclusions. No one can be made an actress or a dramatic reader in a day, or without a good deal of expense. Your own good sense must tell you that. But if you do possess, as I believe is the case, just the talent required to make a dramatic artist of a high order, would it not be worth while to spend both time and money about your education, though you could not reap the benefit for many years? When the time came, remember that you would make more in a day than you could do in a year by your little school. You could buy as much goat's milk and as many little blue coats for Hilaire as you pleased!"

"He would be grown up," she said, with a blank face. "And of what use to talk

of impossibilities? Uncle Bryan can't spend a penny about me, Aunt Emmie said so, and I must try to earn money at once. But it must be at home. I would rather starve than leave Hilaire! Everyone wants me to leave Hilaire, but I won't!"

"Patience, patience! You talk of impossibilities, my little girl, but are they not of your own making? I would make the thing possible for you, if you chose. I have a friend, a lady, who is one of the finest living actresses, and out of her friendship for me, I am sure she would take you as a pupil. She is good, and kind, and beautiful, and I am sure you would love her very much."

"And where is the money to come from?" Brigitte added, wishing now to raise as many obstacles as possible.

"That is my affair. I would undertake

to find the money, and when you are rich, you should pay it back."

Brigitte opened her large black eyes, and looked at him incredulously.

"Why are you so kind to me? I do not understand?"

"I am like the rest of the world, and when I am benevolent, I try to do myself a kindness at the same time," Papillon answered. He never blushed except when praised for a good action. "Well, I will try to explain. I write plays, then. Did you know it?"

"Yes, I hear Aunt Helwyse and Mr. Kingsbury talking about the *Gipsy Queen*, and they said it was not so good as the *Poacher's Daughter*," Brigitte said.

"How unkind of them! But my plays, then, are performed in London, and it is very difficult for me to find a heroine to my mind. So few actresses really care about their parts, and throw heart and

soul into them. Now, I am sure you would do this, if you entered seriously upon the career, and if you will let me help you, you shall be trained to the stage, on purpose to act the part of my heroines and please me."

"Are you quite sure I should be able to make money as easily as you say?" Brigitte urged, still looking for obstacles, still thinking of Hilaire.

"We should find that out, and would not go on if your powers seemed insufficient. Come, you will try, will you not? Think what a fine thing it would be for you to make money and friends as your Aunt Helwyse is doing—only actresses make more than artists, generally speaking—to be rich and independent, in fact."

He went on, watching the young, changing face, wholly unable to divine her thoughts.

"I have as yet not mentioned this to anyone. I wished first to hear what you had to say, and if you refuse it shall remain a secret between us two. But do not be too hasty about it. Remember how much you would be able to do for your brothers; and I am sure you would lead a happy life."

"Should I live with you? I should like that."

"Well, not exactly, I think, but I should see you very, very often, and you would, of course, look to me for everything, and come to me whenever you needed advice——"

"What is the use of talking of it?" she cried, with a sudden change of voice, and an expression of deep pain. "I like you. I am sure you would always be kind to me. I should love to be an actress better than anything. But wherever I go I must take Hilaire with me."

"Then, my dear Brigitte, you cannot study for the stage."

"You do not know how it is, no one knows," she said, almost piteously. It seemed to her as if, between them all, her friends would finish by compelling her to give up Hilaire. "I care more about him than anything in the world. I have had him to care for since he was a tiny baby. No one can understand how fond we are of each other."

"Suppose I leave you for a quarter of an hour to think it over by yourself," said Papillon, kindly. "It is quite right and natural that you should think so much of your little brother, but remember that if you consent to be parted from him for a few years now, it is only to better his prospects in the future. In fact, you would not only enrich yourself, but become the stay and

support of your whole family—and remember that such an opportunity may never occur again."

The tempter went on, putting bribe after bribe before the young inexperienced mind till it wavered. Brigitte sat still, her hands clasped on her knees, her eyes bent on the ground, torn by conflicting desires. On the one hand, was poverty, humiliation, daily cares innumerable, and a life of toil and privation for herself and her orphaned brothers; on the other, independence, ease, prosperity for all. Not that, as far as she herself was concerned, she cared at all for money or money's worth. Papillon's offer did not for a moment conjure up before her imagination such dreams as would have dazzled most young girls under the same circumstances. She never once thought of the luxuries, pleasures, and triumphs awaiting her in the enchanted world of

which he spoke. She only thought of Hilaire having all the dear-bought comforts he needed, of the boys being fairly started in the world, of Uncle Bryan and Aunt Emilia repaid for their sacrifices, and freed from their burden, of a thousand blessings she could shower down upon them all!

Poor Brigitte had never found time to think of herself, and the only selfish thought that flitted across her mind now was this—how pleasant to be near Papillon always, to have a kind friend ever at hand, ready to teach and admonish, but not to scold! His light-heartedness and good-nature had quite won her heart. She felt more at ease with him than with any of her new friends at Beechholme Park, and he always addressed her in the tongue of her beloved France—a sure road to her confidence. But could she ever leave Hilaire? Even for his own

advantage, could she ever leave him? He was delicate and ailing, and depended so entirely upon her; he fretted even if she were out of his sight for an hour. No, the matter was not to be thought of for a moment. It was kind of Mr. Papillon to offer to do so much for her—she felt sure no one else would ever be half so kind—but the thing was impossible.

She would plod on with her little school, and bear Aunt Emmie's crossness as best she could. She would work hard at her sums, and might perhaps be able to pay for Patrice's schooling by her earnings. In a few years' time he also would be able to go out into the world, and perhaps they could all four make a little home together near Uncle Bryan. That had hitherto been her cherished dream of the future, the goal and perspective acmé of her hopes and expectations. She must stay with

Hilaire, as she had promised her dying mother—anyhow, she must stay with him till he was old enough to shift without her. In time he would grow up into a man, but till then Aunt Emmie, Mrs. Cornwell, and Mr. Papillon might urge, tempt, and coax in vain. She would never leave Hilaire.

Thus reasoned Brigitte as she sat amid the splendours of that September morning. She did not heed the lark singing overhead, nor the bumble-bee humming close by, nor the large purple shadows dropped by the passing clouds on the far-off sweeps of gorse and heather. She was only conscious at that moment of the difference between this free, exulting, happy nature, and her own poor little perplexed life. A problem it had ever seemed, but a problem hardest of all to solve now, since she had to choose between two duties—duty to

herself, Uncle Bryan, and the boys, and duty to Hilaire and her dead mother.

When, at the end of a quarter of an hour, Papillon came back, there was such a look of past conflict and painful resolve on her face, that he stooped down to kiss her, as if she had been a five-year-old child needing consolation. The kiss and the kind word accompanying it were too much for poor Brigitte's overwrought mind. She could not help crying a little, but, when it was over, smiled gratefully upon her comforter, and looked herself again.

"Don't make me think any more about it," she said. "I should have liked nothing so well, if Hilaire could have stayed with me. I know you would always be very kind, and I do want to earn money. But let me forget it all, because it is impossible."

"You are a good girl. I cannot, of course, blame you; I am sure you would always try to do what is right," he answered very kindly. "Well, whenever you are in need of a friend, remember that you have one in Hubert Papillón. Do you know where I live?"

"No, indeed," Brigitte said, making up her mind that she would embroider him a pair of slippers or a pocket-handkerchief for New Year's Day. "Will you write it in my *Paroissienne?*"

And straightway she produced a tiny, well-worn prayer-book, which had been her Catholic mother's, and which the child always carried about with her as a sacred relic. There was a space on the blank leaf pasted inside the cover, and under the name, scrawled in a childish hand—*Brigitte Fleming*—he wrote carefully in pencil,

"*Hubert Papillon, No.* 5, *Bryanstone Square, London.*"

"There! if you ever change your mind, my dear, or if you are in any trouble, and you think I can help you out of it, write to me. Think of me," and as he said this, he made a wry face, which she did not see —"as a father, you know."

"No, I won't," answered Brigitte, kissing her precious *Paroissienne* before she put it back into her pocket.

"Why not?"

"I cannot tell you—don't ask me," she said, turning away her face; and then Papillon suddenly recollected the sad story he had heard of Brigitte's early trials with that often half-mad father of hers, who had drunk away his children's small heritage.

"Well, as a brother, then?"

"No, as an uncle! But now will you take me home? I am sure it must be nearly dinner-time, and I promised Aunt Helwyse never to be late. Do you mind if I run on before and leave you behind, because you won't get scolded, you know?"

Papillon re-assured her by his watch, and they leisurely descended the heath, talking gaily of many things. The man of the world, the dandy, as his friends often called him, the dilettante artist and author, found himself amused and attracted by the naïveté of this half-French, half-Irish girl, as he had seldom been before. He had the reputation of being indifferent to female charms, and though a frequenter of fashionable drawing-rooms, and an adept in the art of flirtation, was never known to have been in love. Report went farther still, and accused him of having no heart at all. But everyone liked him, and he

was well known for many kind, nay, chivalrous actions, of a piece with this intended generosity to Brigitte.

CHAPTER X.

A NEST OF YOUNG OWLS.

WHILST Brigitte and Papillon were out on the hills, an animated art-discussion was going on in Mrs. Cornwell's boudoir. Kingsbury, Helwyse, and Freeland had planned the decorations together, and up to the present time harmoniously; but, with regard to the boudoir, opinion was divided. Kingsbury, taking up palette and brush, dashed in one pattern for the mouldings; Helwyse, another; Freeland, a third—which of the three should be decided upon?

"Miss Fleming must choose whether she

will have her charming little idylls framed in classic, Eastern, or domestic style," Kingsbury said. "For my part, I am far from satisfied with my own suggestion. I merely give it as the best I can offer."

"But," Freeland put in eagerly, his whole mind engrossed on the work, "pardon me, Mr. Kingsbury, I cannot help thinking that the decorations here should be considered more in their relation to the rest than anything else. To do otherwise would surely be like building a house with a Renaissance *façade*, Gothic chimneys, and Tudor porticos."

"Mr. Freeland is right, I think," Helwyse said, reluctantly. "Your design is very classic and beautiful, Mr. Kingsbury, but I think my modest little frescoes would be overwhelmed by it."

"Not at all. First see how the colours I have selected throw up your drawing.

You must make it firmer, broader, more telling."

"True. Those sporting children are sadly wanting in character and expression as yet," Helwyse said, almost sadly. The least word of disapprobation from him made her feel as if excellence were wholly unattainable.

"They are the merest suggestions at present. But you have begun well. Only don't let Freeland beguile you into timidity about the borders. Make your work as good as you can without thinking of anyone else's at all."

"That is just what I say—only I prefer my border," Freeland said, smiling, though just a trifle vexed; and he saw that Kingsbury was just a trifle vexed too. Both looked at Helwyse, for the decision devolved upon her. Would she for a moment

hesitate between the opinion of a renowned Academician and a humble house decorator?

She coloured a little; but though the thought of displeasing Kingsbury was insupportable, the transparent truthfulness of her nature won the day. She could not feign even the homage that she felt due to him from his devout disciple and admirer, and, raising her candid eyes, said—

"And so do I. I think, moreover, that, as Mr. Freeland is charged with the decorations as a whole, he is perhaps the best person to decide the matter."

"Certainly," Kingsbury answered, far too good-natured and polite to feel more than a shade of disappointment that Helwyse should be ruled by anyone but himself, adding—"And, after all, Freeland, you are so much of an artist yourself that

you have no business to consult us at all."

Freeland coloured with pleasure, whilst Helwyse thought to herself, who in the world was so generous, so large-minded as her benefactor?—using the word, of course, in an intellectual sense. But she saw that she had, perhaps, in the slightest degree, yet palpably, annoyed him, and could not help fancying to herself that his leave-taking was less cordial than usual. For, very soon after that consultation was over, the carriage drove up to convey him to the station; and at the children's dinner that day there were two clouded faces. Brigitte was thinking of the brilliant prospects she had just thrown aside, whilst Helwyse felt sorry to lose her friend. She loved Kingsbury's society; she missed it as the best thing in the daily existence at Beechholme Park now. There—as far as she knew—her feeling for him ended. Mr.

Cornwell, whose quick eyes at once noted Helwyse's downcast looks, felt unjustly angry with her distinguished visitor.

Nothing, indeed, could have been more circumspect than Kingsbury's behaviour to his beautiful young fellow-artist. Papillon ventured upon a dozen friendlinesses that the other would never have dreamed of; Papillon praised, blamed, and criticised her drawings almost impertinently; why, then, was it that the first was held guilty, whilst the last was let off scot-free?

It were, indeed, hard to say, except the settled opinion of common friends—that Kingsbury's liking meant love, and Papillon's nothing at all. Both men had known Helwyse from the beginning of her art career; both openly admired her talent, her beauty, and herself; and both were men any noble-minded girl might safely consent to marry. But common friends

felt sure that the one wanted to marry her, and the other did not, and felt disappointed at Kingsbury's slowness to realise their expectations.

To-day Helwyse and Brigitte also soon shook off their pensiveness. Life was so good and so gladsome at Beechholme Park!

Throughout the early part of the glowing, breezy afternoon, Brigitte and the children were playing in shady dells and hollows, watching the squirrels among the reddening maple branches, gathering spikes of spindle-berry—coral of the woods!—plucking rich purple blackberries from secluded hedges, finding Ladies' tresses and Jews' ears in damp corners. Rosie and Janie had never cared for these things before, but the joy of Brigitte and Hilaire in country things infected them, and they also learned to love the woodlands. Then

Brigitte, when in buoyant spirits, as she generally was at Beechholme Park, would sing, dance, tell stories, act the mimic, and amuse them in a dozen ways. A little happiness, a little freedom from cares, had wonderfully developed the girl's nature. She found herself able to enjoy as she had never done before, and enjoyments may be to some natures the very best moral teacher in the world, widening, uplifting, enlarging.

"Why, Brigitte," Hilaire would say, wonderingly, "how is it you so seldom sang and danced in France?"

Then for a moment her face would cloud as she recalled the trouble and tumult of those early years.

Meantime, Helwyse, seated by an open bay window of the spacious drawing-room, was amusing herself with palette and sketch-book in that dreamy, half-inspired

mood, often so productive, and always so delicious to the born artist. She was leisurely sketching a group of majestic Japanese lilies in a blue vase, but every now and then would lay down brush and palette to breathe a little sigh of enjoyment as her eye wandered over the exquisite garden landscape and purpling wood beyond. A great writer has said, "Every painter should live in a palace;" and there is no doubt that the perpetual sight of lovely and splendid things do work marvellously on the imagination, and influence it more than is generally supposed. Helwyse never for a moment lost the sensation of perfect intellectual contentment that always awaited her at Beechholme Park. The large, tastefully-furnished rooms, the well-selected pictures adorning the walls, the choice tapestries, the gorgeous Persian carpets, the combined airiness, elegance,

and freshness, gave her a constant feeling of satisfaction and pleasure. She adored loveliness in every shape—how else would she ever have deserved the name of artist? —and to be surrounded by it, reminded of it, inspired by it all day long, was to live in a state of perpetual benediction. The facility for being left alone with our thoughts offered to us in great houses is moreover one of their greatest privileges.

For hours Helwyse had been sitting undisturbed in the drawing-room, dreaming, meditating, or painting, as she list, the soft air wafting fragrance with every breath, and now and then a shower of crimson creamy rose-leaves to her feet. She hardly knew how the time had sped, when suddenly the door opened, and Papillon, putting in his head, said,

"Come, Miss Fleming, are you going to forget your promise to visit the young

owls, because it is time to be off. Can I fetch your hat?—and may I fetch Brigitte too?"

"I don't know if Mr. Freeland has left off his work yet. It is of no use to go without him," Helwyse said, and putting away her painting things, the two went in search of Freeland and Brigitte.

Freeland had gone home, however, and Brigitte was not to be found, so Papillon and Helwyse started for the farm alone, taking a round by the woods. Mr. Cornwell was to sleep in town that night, Mrs. Cornwell was making calls miles away, and the dinner, if dinner it could be called, was put off indefinitely. "We will dine whenever we find ourselves so disposed, so you can stay out painting as long as you please to-day, my dear," the hostess had said to Helwyse at starting; and both Helwyse and Papillon were determined to

enjoy the liberty thus afforded them to the utmost.

"We will see the owls, and you can make your sketch," he said. "Then I will take you a wonderful walk, across the moors. But I wish Brigitte had come, too. I have taken an uncommon liking to that child, and I may as well tell you now what kind of proposal I made to her this very morning."

Just then they heard their names called loudly, and, looking back, saw Brigitte coming after them as fast as her feet could carry her.

"The servants said you had been asking for me, so I felt sure I might come; and Hilaire is as happy as possible, helping Rosie and Janie to make cakes," she said, as soon as she recovered breath, then, giving a hand to each, walked on between them.

Outside the woods all was glow and colour, but as soon as they entered the solemn arcades of oak and elm, they passed into a dusky realm of silence and shadow. Here and there flashed marvellous gems of colour, airy little cups of vermillion, delicate leaflets of orange, inverted bells of pale amethyst, or large tufts of crimson and gold—those gorgeous and fanciful flowers of the under-world we designate by the unmusical name of fungi; or they traversed a light and airy vestibule of interlaced birch and larch, the sunshine flooding the screen-work of tender leaves with deepest, warmest gold, or they dipped and climbed ferny hollows and honeysuckled banks, having the woods all round them, with now and then a glimpse of deep blue hills far away.

Hollow Farm was a pleasant, old-world nook, and it never looked cosier than

now. To Papillon, who loved ease and comforts when they came in his way, the sight of Freeland's cool parlour, with its easy chairs and cheery tea-table, was as grateful as those woodland spectacles he had just descanted on so rapturously.

"This is delightful," he said, sinking into a chair and fanning himself. "We have had a very hot walk, and I am sure I never felt so disposed for tea in my life before. What a capital fellow you are to think of giving it to us, Freeland."

"I thought Miss Helwyse and the young lady might be tired," Freeland said, edging away. "Will you kindly ring if you want anything. I—I am going to look after the young owls."

"Nonsense! If you don't share it with us, we will refuse your hospitality," Papillon said, pushing a chair towards him. "Come, no excuse. Brigitte will pour out the tea,

and you shall talk to Miss Fleming and me. I am quite exhausted, what with the heat and the hills."

Freeland looked at Helwyse, not without embarrassment. She said quite naturally, as she took off her hat and mantle and laid them aside,

"Of course. And how charmingly your landlady has arranged the tea-table! What delicious sweet-Williams and picotees! May I have one, Mr. Freeland?"

Naturally there was nothing left for Freeland to do but hand her the flowers and sit down, which he did, beaming with pleasure. At first he felt a little pardonable awkwardness, but Helwyse was so kind, Papillon so amusing in an indolent sort of way, and Brigitte so loquacious, that by-and-by he talked like the rest, and felt quite at home.

"I say, Freeland," Papillon said, sud-

denly, as he sent up his cup for a sixth tea, "why don't you give up the technical part of your work altogether and go in for the—" he stopped short, being on the point of saying "gentlemanly," and added—"for the artistic? You could do it so easily. You would make more money. You would put yourself in quite a different position. You would like the work much better. I am not in jest, but as serious as can be, I do assure you. Go to Italy with me in November, study hard for a year, and come back a——" again that unmanageable word "gentleman" was on his lips—"and come back an artist."

Freeland coloured to the roots of his hair as he slowly answered—

"I have thought about it, but I don't know if it is worth while. I am a very good decorator. I might cut a poor figure at painting."

"Well, you needn't paint. What I mean is, give up doing workman's work; get up a good knowledge of drawing and designing, and stick to that; devote two or three years to study and travel, then find out what you can do."

Again Freeland looked at Helwyse, and again she answered, with perfect naturalness—Brigitte herself could not have been more candid—

"I quite agree with Mr. Papillon."

That was all. Papillon would fain have discussed the subject further, but Freeland contrived to turn the conversation into another channel. He could have talked freely of himself and his affairs to Helwyse alone, but he could not do it in company, and it was a relief to him when they went out of doors.

The evening was deliciously soft, many-hued and mellow. As they crossed the old-

fashioned orchard, with its low-branched fruit-trees, the slanting rays of the setting sun were lending new richness to red-ripe pear and apple. Amid these gorgeous hues stood out the fruit-laden damson-trees, bosses of velvety purple, whilst every breath of wind brought down some over-ripe plum or pear to the ground. The long, thick grass through which they walked was yet warm with the day's sunshine, only an ox-eyed daisy, tall, stately, and star-like, breaking here and there the monotony of dusky green. All the fowls had gone to roost; the cows were in the neat house; and the farm-yard, usually so full of life, and so resonant with rustic music, was solitary and silent. On one side lay the stack-yard, and behind this the sun was setting—the tower-like piles of pale gold corn being flooded with amber light.

They entered the barn, and Freeland,

having first ascertained that the mother owl had flitted, led the way to the loft, and brought down the young owls from their nest in the roof to be inspected. Certainly, odder little beings it were hard to find, at first sight looking as if made up of mouth and feet—in fact, extraordinarily like those mythic birds of antiquity, with monstrous head, and no body to speak of. There is something comic and pathetic, too, in the smallness of their size, and general helplessness, contrasted with their aggressive, nay, warlike behaviour—eyes, beak, and quills all looking on the defensive.

But to make a sketch was not easy. The light was going. The mother owl was beating her wings impatiently against the rafters, and Papillon was growing impatient for the projected walk. So, after a hasty attempt, Helwyse shut up her

sketch-book, and they started homewards, Freeland accompanying them to the farm-yard gate.

"I think I could manage to get you a better view of the nest if you really wish it, Miss Helwyse," he said. "But you would have to mount a ladder and use a lantern to draw by. You see, the evenings get shorter and shorter, and if you come before the old bird is fairly off on her rounds, she won't leave us a minute."

"Thank you very much. I think I must have another try. It would make such a quaint little picture. But I will let you know."

He was about to say good night, and return indoors, when Papillon cried—

"You mustn't go yet, Freeland. I want you to show us the way home by Pine Edge —that is to say, if you are disposed for a walk, and have nothing else to do. I could

find it out by daylight, but the dark roads are so perplexing."

Of course Freeland consented, and Brigitte and Papillon being busily occupied in a French talk about their beloved France—for Papillon loved France like a Frenchman, as indeed he called and regarded himself—Freeland followed behind with Helwyse. She had on a white dress—it was a passion with Helwyse to wear white dresses in summer time—and he noticed on her neck the blue Venetian beads of the mysterious casket. It was still so warm that she permitted him to carry her sky-blue mantle, which he did as tenderly as if it had been herself, thinking all the time that the silvery stars twinkling through the blue beheld no sweeter, purer being on God's earth than this white-robed maiden by his side. Everything she wore, everything she

did, everything she said, was, in his eyes, dear, lovely, and sacred. No other woman, were she heroic as Lady Godiva, gifted as Sappho, beautiful as King Candaule's bride, could be compared with her.

They walked along, at first talking only of the twilight landscape, the glorious sky, the wide stretching prospect on either side; at last Helwyse said, after a pause—she had noticed her companion's thoughtfulness, and naturally attributed it to the recent conversation—

"I am quite sure Mr. Papillon is sincere in his proposals. He had before mentioned the subject to me. Why do you not accept his invitation, and go to Italy?"

"Is it worth while? I am not quite sure. What Mr. Papillon means, in plain words, is this—make a gentleman of yourself, don't be a workman any longer. But

supposing the transformation is possible, even easy, is it worth making?"

"I should say, yes, taking into account your tastes, education, and habits of life generally. You seem to me to have much more sympathy with our class than your own—I mean with the class to which you ought to have belonged."

"Yes, I should like well enough to live as I once dreamed of doing. I would much rather have been an artist, like Mr. Kingsbury, than a workman like Arthur Freeland. Still may not this craving be, after all, the mere outcome of vanity and personal ambition, and, if so, would it not be contemptible to encourage it? I might be laughed at by my best friends for my pains."

"They would not be your friends if they laughed at you. But there is certainly another and a much higher con-

sideration," Helwyse said, earnestly. "You belong—not in the spirit, I am sure, but in the letter—to what is called the working-classes. I suppose there are very few others, if any, like you. You must do them good."

"That is just what I feel," he answered, in an eager tone. "I am no politician, I am no political economist, I neither make nor meddle with affairs that do not concern me. But as a man, a workman, and a citizen, I do try, with all the strength that in me lies, to make my life as good and true as it can be made. Whether I succeed or not is quite another matter. I am sure that such individual efforts are not lost in the long run, and that single-mindedness and self-denial, no matter on how humble a scale, are wanted more than anything else to raise the workman from his present position."

"And if you left his ranks, he would have one good example the less. I understand you exactly," Helwyse said, touched and interested. "Yes, it is a noble sacrifice."

"Stay, I do not think noble is quite the word. You overrate what I am doing. It has been only lately that the thought of a rise in my social condition has occurred to me. As yet I have sacrificed nothing. But the temptation now harasses me at times. I cannot help dwelling on it and encouraging it. I know that I am more useful where I am, and I feel that perhaps I might not get what I want if I become what I wish to be. Yet I am restless, and, ashamed to say, at times discontented."

"But you need not forsake the workman's cause, if, in your own person, you cease to be one yourself. These club and

reading-rooms you have so often talked of would go on all the same, and you could keep up an interest in them and help such schemes wherever and whatever you were."

"No, Miss Helwyse, I think you are wrong there. If I lift myself into a higher social position, I must cease to have part and lot in my old life. Just think of it. Here is a man who has been preaching to his fellow-workmen, all his life, the duty of raising himself—not out of his sphere—but out of himself, out of his grovelling tastes and habits, out of his ignorance, his want of self-respect, his narrow class feeling, his selfishness. He has been ringing the changes on that theme for years; he has, as far as circumstances would permit, been consistent, hitherto, setting the quality of his work and the conscientiousness of his daily life before everything else. Well, on a sudden,

he turns round and says, 'I have been befooling you, my men, all along. *This* is what I have really been striving after, *this* is the prize I really meant when I talked to you of righteousness and a good life!' and he should hold up to their view, not the reward he had before talked of, namely, self-esteem and good report among honest men, but worldly prosperity, or, if you please to call it, social advancement, in other words, the enjoyment of a more agreeable, more refined, genial existence. Should I not deserve some hard names after such conduct, Miss Helwyse?"

"I am not sure. I think you have a right to enjoy the fruits of your self-denial and self-culture. In spite of all you say, I am inclined to support Mr. Papillon."

They had ascended a steep winding road, and were now on the brow of a sharp hill crested with pines, overlooking a

large, lovely valley and the white walls of a little village shining amid the silvery green, whilst beyond, golden goblet shedding amber-coloured wine, rose the harvest moon, and emptied its crimson radiance upon the scene.

Their companions were far in advance, and Freeland felt that such an opportunity of speaking openly to her might not soon happen again. As they lingered, gazing on this exquisite prospect, he said quickly,

"Tell me one thing, Miss Helwyse. If I do resolve to follow Mr. Papillon's advice, would it make any difference to you?"

"Why should it?" she answered again, with that perfect naturalness which made him feel how far he was from being understood. "I have always felt the sincerest regard for you. I have always looked

upon you as a friend. You would not be changed, you know."

And saying this, she smiled archly. It seemed to her so odd that Freeland could suppose any change in his outward circumstances would alter her opinion of him. Whether he remained a workman to the end of his days, or inherited a title and fortune, she should always look upon him as a gentleman in the best and highest sense of the word.

"You do not understand me," he went on, rather reproachfully. "Would it make you feel as if we were equals—socially speaking, I mean?"

Again Helwyse smiled, nay, laughed, a grave little laugh; and as they stood there side by side, leaning upon a rustic gate, touched his arm encouragingly, and said—

"Indeed, I have never felt as if it were otherwise. I do not come of blue blood,

any more than you. I happen to have been brought up and educated rather differently, that is all; and now we naturally mix with different sets of people. But when we are talking together, as we do now, I forget all about it. I am sure that Mr. Papillon and most of my friends forget it too."

Her candour made it seem to him impossible to go on. He dared not put into words the thought of his mind, and without putting it into words, he saw that he should be misunderstood. But as yet he had no courage. He merely said—

"You may forget it, and many of your friends. But of course that is a difference; and whilst I remain a workman, it must be. If I were socially ranked with any of them—Mr. Papillon, for example—you can understand that we should meet on a different footing."

"Of course," she answered, laughing

merrily. "For instance, you would be going to Beechholme Park now, and you would have to wear a dress coat and a white tie, and would most likely be asked to take Mrs. Hampshire in to dinner. I think it would bore you. I think you would lose as much as you would gain by the change. I think I like you best as you are."

"There!" he said, not without a touch of irritation. "You are laughing at me yourself, and yet just now you seemed incredulous when I talked of appearing contemptible in the eyes of others. No, I shall most likely stay where I am, and remain a humble decorator to the end."

He was not affronted, but vexed. She saw it, and hastened to make amends.

"I am sure you must know that in my heart I should never laugh at anything you might do, but should honour and respect

you always," she said. He thanked her for the speech; then they quitted the gate by which they had lingered so long, and followed the road winding downwards towards Beechholme Park. There were stars shining in the deep blue heavens, and glow-worms —lesser stars—twinkling amidst the dusky green, and woodland perfumes were wafted by as they went along. In spite of the temporary check her words had given to his day-dreams, Freeland let all the loveliness and repose of the scene steal over his heart. Talking earnestly of many things, they reached the park gates, where Papillon and Brigitte joined them.

CHAPTER XI.

TRAVELLING THIRD-CLASS.

MEANTIME, the visit of Brigitte and Hilaire was drawing to a close, and after three weeks' sojourn in fairyland, the day was fixed for them to return to London, under Papillon's protection. Helwyse was to stay a few days longer, in order to get on with her frescoes; and then a new relay of visitors for the pheasant-shooting would enjoy the hospitality of Beechholme Park, till host and hostess quitted it for their winter residence in Kensington.

Poor Brigitte, as well as Hilaire, would have shed some natural tears at leaving

this spacious Paradise for the tiny garden, small rooms, and not unfrequent scoldings of Hornsey Rise, but for various consolations. Rosie and Janie had generously packed a box of broken toys for Hilaire, adding a new box of bricks, as Rosie said, "for the look of the thing;" while Mrs. Cornwell, whose motherly heart warmed to all boyish humanity, no matter how awkward, clothes-destroying, or mischievous, ordered a hamper of jam to be packed for Patrice and Ambroise, adding also, perhaps "for the look of the thing," some hothouse flowers for Aunt Emmie. But the crowning delight and bribe to happy spirits was Papillon's parting gift in the shape of the prettiest little blue coat for Hilaire ever seen out of a pantomime. It had come from London, was of sky-blue velvet, had half a dozen little pockets, mother-of-pearl buttons as large as pennies, and so well became

Hilaire's fair hair and delicate complexion, that, as Brigitte declared in raptures, he looked like an angel. Papillon would have much preferred to give his favourite a trinket for herself instead, but knew her already too well to doubt that a present to Hilaire would be much more acceptable. Brigitte, in fact, did not seem to care about herself at all; and when she saw her darling, who was really a most winsome and angel-faced little child, arrayed in the longed-for garment, she was so happy that the two danced for joy, and finally both falling upon Papillon, almost smothered him with kisses.

When they arrived at the station, they had a little quarrel. Out came from beneath her glove exactly the sum for a second-class ticket and a half to London, upon which Hilaire said naturally,

"We are going to be grand to-day,

for when Brigitte and I travel alone, we always go third-class, don't we, Brigitte?"

"But Aunt Helwyse said we were to go first, if you prefer it," Brigitte added, apologetically. "I have got more money in my pockets, only I would rather not spend it, if you please."

"Let your money stay where it is," said Papillon, with some vexation, and, appearing not to notice the proffered half-sovereign and two shillings, produced a couple of sovereigns from his waistcoat-pocket, and took three first-class tickets. He had never travelled otherwise in his life, and would not for worlds have been seen with a young lady entering a second, much less a third-class railway carriage. But Brigitte was far the most vexed of the two. It irritated her that Papillon would not take her money; and when, after a good deal of

entreaty, he was prevailed upon to do so, it grieved her that Aunt Helwyse had not sent them up alone.

"I can quite well take care of myself and Hilaire to the world's end," she said, almost ready to cry; "so if you won't travel second-class with me the next time we make a journey together, you shall go by yourself, and Hilaire and I by ourselves at the other end of the train."

"Well, do not look so cross," Papillon answered; "and do not scold me any more. I will travel fourth class next time."

"Nonsense. You know there is *no* fourth class," Brigitte said, talking to him very much as if he were Hilaire. "I hate to see money wasted—anybody's money, I mean; and I am sure you would not waste it if you had been put to such shifts as I have."

"And three hundred and sixty-five sous

make eighteen francs and twenty-five centimes a year, and that much buys a coat or a dress. That is what Brigitte is always saying," Hilaire added, thinking he might moralize also.

"Come, suppose we amuse ourselves some better way than by doing sums," Papillon began. "Let us each tell a story." And straightway he began a fairy-tale of his own inventing. Brigitte followed the example. Hilaire told his tiny little tale, then Papillon produced sugar-plums, and they munched them for the rest of the way.

When they arrived at Waterloo Station, there was another little battle. Papillon wanted to put his charges into a cab, give them lunch at a restaurant, then send them home under the care of a flyman he knew of, but Brigitte resisted stoutly. She wished he would

leave her to manage her own affairs, she said; she could quite well get home, luggage and all, by train for a quarter of the money. A conflict thereupon took place between Papillon's Sybaritism and chivalrousness. Should he follow the dictates of his inclination, jump into the nearest hansom cab, and drive to his club alone; or should he accompany Brigitte on that tedious railway journey from one end of London to the other she described so enthusiastically? Finally, he did neither one nor the other, but satisfied his conscience with a compromise, accompanying the two young travellers as far as King's Cross, and seeing them into a Hornsey train.

Poor Papillon felt himself a bit of a martyr as, in his spotless white waistcoat and irreproachable dust-coat, he followed the triumphant Brigitte into a crowded

third-class carriage of the Metropolitan Railway. The weather was hot and dusty, and their fellow-travellers happened to be rather stout working women with bundles and day-labourers returning home with their baskets of tools. Papillon looked at Brigitte's supremely contented face in amazement. Was it possible that she had neither eyes nor nose for these unsightly and unsavoury surroundings? He felt angry with her for her insensibility, and he could not so far enter into her feelings or circumstances as to realise the absolute necessity of such miserable little economies. In his eyes to travel third-class seemed about as undignified and unseemly as to go unwashed, wear dirty or ragged clothes, or commit any other violation of propriety and decorous behaviour.

That journey from Waterloo Bridge to King's Cross by undergound railway, in com-

pany of herring baskets and pots of paint—for poor Papillon happened to be placed between an itinerant vendor of herrings and a house-painter with his pots and tools—seemed interminable. At last he could bear it no longer, and leaning forward, gasped out to Brigitte in French,

"My dear child, have you a scent-bottle?"

"Oh, yes," Brigitte said, looking greatly concerned—"at least, my vinaigrette. But do take my place near the window."

"Give me the vinaigrette!" cried Papillon, desperately.

Brigitte handed him her vinaigrette, and bethought herself of a little eau-de-Cologne she had in her basket. Hilaire suffered from headaches, and she always carried a little about with her, if possible, in case of need; so she produced her bottle, and the delighted Papillon, taking out the cork,

emptied the contents on the top of his head. Then he felt better, and sniffing the vinaigrette from time to time, contrived to reach his journey's end without depriving Brigitte of her seat.

When they were fairly at King's Cross, they had to change carriages, and here another trial occurred. Brigitte, ever on the alert to save her halfpennies, having first laden Hilaire with parcels as big as himself, next seized the rest, in spite of all that Papillon could say, and thus laden, proceeded to the other end of the platform. Then there was another elaborate packing into another close and crowded compartment, and finally the moment of departure for Hornsey came. Brigitte, about to make her adieux, suddenly noticed Papillon's dismayed looks, and not for a moment dreaming the cause, cried eagerly—

"Oh, Mr. Papillon, I am sure you are

feeling ill. Would you like me to go home with you?"

She had been used to the care of helpless humanity of the other sex from her earliest years, first acting almost a maternal part to her often drink-stupefied father, and afterwards taking the place of a mother to her younger brothers. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to make this offer to her kind friend. Might he not faint in the streets and be robbed? Might he not tumble down and hurt himself?

"Thank you, my dear. I am quite well, I assure you, only oppressed by the heat. Good-bye," he said quickly, and again shaking hands, hastened away, laughing inwardly, though out of temper, and feeling generally uncomfortable. There was a hansom cab outside the station, and jumping in, he drove straight home, ordered a warm bath and clean clothes (one might almost have

supposed, from the numerous disinfecting processes he went through, that he had just come out of a plague-stricken place), then having smoked a cigar and taken a choice cup of tea slightly flavoured with brandy, he drove to his club to dine.

The next day he joined a party of friends bound to Switzerland and the Tyrol, and, as was very natural, forgot all about Brigitte Fleming.

Meanwhile poor Brigitte and Hilaire had not been welcomed home as rapturously as they might have expected. Patrice and Ambroise, of course, were overjoyed to see them again, and so were the little girls, especially as they had come home laden with toys and jam; but Aunt Emmie looked cross and harassed, and though she kissed Hilaire kindly and seemed pleased at his improved appearance, Brigitte saw at once that things were not going smooth-

ly at Hornsey Rise. When Hilaire's little blue coat was displayed—by far the most costly juvenile garment that had ever been seen in the modest household—a pang of maternal jealousy went through Emilia's heart. Why should these orphans be dowered whilst her own darlings were passed by? Why should Brigitte and Hilaire be fêted in the houses of the rich, whilst Kathleen and her sister staid at home? Why should Hilaire wear a velvet coat, and Norah a stuff gown? Poor Emilia, mother-like, human-like, could not but look at these young careless things as intruders upon her children's standing room, devourers of her children's heritage. She never for a moment lost sight of the fact that the bread and butter bestowed upon Brigitte and her brothers, might have procured jam and cakes for the little girls, that the money spent on Patrice's boots

might have purchased a feather for Kathleen's hat. And, perhaps unreasonably, it seemed to her now that even at Beechholme Park her own children had been forestalled by these. Who could tell but that Mrs. Cornwell would have invited Kathleen and Margie, and what an advantage for them to mix in such society, and what a pleasure for the children too! Again, all Helwyse's care and generosity would now, of course, be lavished upon the new-comers, and Kathleen, Margie, and Norah pass unnoticed. Even Helwyse's kind proposal of adopting Ambroise vexed and irritated her. The boy must naturally, living with Helwyse always, see more of the world, that is to say, of the cultivated, clever, intellectual world, than his little cousins, and would, in some sense, grow up to be their superior. Emilia tried hard not to show all this, tried hard

to acquit herself of her duty to her husband's foundlings, but she could not always maintain self-control.

The intense narrowness of the maternal instinct, when left to itself, and uninfluenced by other and wider sympathies, was here manifested. To Emilia it seemed monstrous that Bryan should feel as tenderly towards these children as his own, that he should even sacrifice their well-being to that of the orphans, that he should for a moment compare his duties to both, as if they could be at all alike! She could not conceive of a love and a pity sublimer, tenderer, holier even, than that of a mother for her nursling, namely, the lovely, angelic, wide-reaching tenderness and yearning of a noble nature towards the friendless, the fatherless, the forsaken! She could not realize the import of those wonderful words of Jesus of Nazareth—"Blessed are the meek, for they

shall inherit the earth." Nor could she any more have understood the beautiful aphorism of an apostle of humanity of our own day, whose whole life was a sermon upon his text—"*Aux plus déshérités, le plus d'amour.*" Alas! in this frailty of the heart and intellect, poor Emilia but resembled the rest of humanity before it is emancipated from the trammels of material selfishness and the prison walls of spiritual blindness. Must we not believe that there were admirable mothers among the slave-holding aristocracy of ancient Rome and modern America? —tender matrons who could not bear a wind to blow upon their darlings unkindly, yet could complacently see a slave-mother bereft of her suckling? Infinite, indeed, is the gulf between that maternal instinct which leads a lioness to fight for her young, and that wondrous higher love, begotten of Christianity, and all lofty teachers, which

sees in everything helpless, hopeless, or oppressed, an orphandom to love, shield, and do battle for!

As might only be expected, the box-ful of broken toys occasioned first of all a great rejoicing, and lastly a quarrel. Brigitte had agreed with Hilaire that as the others had not enjoyed themselves at Beechholme Park, the toys should be equally divided into six portions, to which the little fellow assented good-naturedly enough, though looking on rather sadly whilst the process of dividing was gone through. Now it happened that among the rest was a catapult, a whole, entire, and new catapult, and we all know well enough that if we want to put a boy into ecstasies, we have only to spend a shilling upon one of these highly objectionable toys. Patrice caught sight of the treasure, and, for the life of him, could not refrain from breaking

the rules Brigitte had imposed, namely, that not a word should be said till the lots were ready, when Hilaire was to choose first, and the rest by turns.

"Oh, Brigitte," cried Patrice, "I am the eldest, and a catapult is a boy's toy. May I have the catapult as my lot? I don't care about anything else."

"No, I should like the catapult," said Kathleen, less because she cared about it than that she wished to assert her rights. "I am the eldest of the girls, Brigitte, and mamma says girls go always before boys."

"What use can a catapult be to you, Kathie?" Patrice said, reproachfully. "Oh, fie, you tomboy!"

That irreverent speech was too much for a proper-minded little person like Kathleen, who liked her cousins well enough, and particularly Patrice—except when he called her names. So she flew into a little passion,

finally declared she cared about none of the toys whatever, and went downstairs in tears, pouring out her grievances to her mother. Emilia was too busy with the supper to pay any heed to her complaint just then, but when, ten minutes later, the others came down, Patrice having been scolded by Brigitte into relinquishing the catapult, she said angrily—

"No, Patrice, I cannot have you sit down to supper. Whilst you persist in upsetting the house, and calling Kathleen names, you must please keep out of my sight."

It was certainly a little hard upon Patrice. The table was spread with the good things out of Mrs. Cornwell's hamper, and permission to sit up to supper was so rare a privilege! Then he had not heard half Brigitte's news yet, and he wanted Uncle Bryan to see his toys, and advise him as to repairs.

Without a word he went back to the

nursery and sat down on his little bed in the dark. Tears streamed down his cheeks as he thought of Kathleen's pettishness and Aunt Emmie's injustice. After all he had decided to give up the catapult, and he had not intended to insult Kathleen, but Uncle Bryan would be sure to hear all about it, and would look at him coldly next morning.

He wished he could do something to earn his own living, so as to be independent. Would Uncle Bryan let him go to sea, he wondered, to serve in a ship? He felt sure—for the truth had dawned upon the boy slowly—that Aunt Emmie did not want him, that she would be glad to have him away. And Ambroise was going to live with Aunt Helwyse. That was a bitter disappointment. Aunt Helwyse was nicer than anyone. He should have loved to be with Aunt Helwyse, only Ambroise was to

go because he had a taste for drawing. When, a little later, Brigitte entered softly, bearing a candle and a plate piled up with bread and jam—poor Patrice had as enormous an appetite as any boy in London—he burst into tears afresh.

Brigitte placed her candle and plate on the table, then, sitting on the bed beside him, scolded him for his tears, and they talked together, cheek laid to cheek, and arms entwined.

"What good does crying do?—you know, to be sent out of the room isn't a great misfortune," she said. "Don't call Kathleen a tomboy any more, and it won't happen again."

"But, Brigitte," Patrice answered, wiping his eyes with his sleeves, "it is sure to be me Aunt Emmie scolds. I am sure I am not a worse boy than Ambroise, but he always gets off."

"Well, dear, you are the biggest—perhaps that is the reason; and, you know, Ambroise is more careful in what he says. Isn't he, now?"

"I wish I could go to sea, Brigitte—that I do."

"But you would get scolded at sea, Patrice. No, get on at school as fast as you can, and when you and Ambroise can both earn enough, we will all live together in a little house. I shall keep a school, and every year we will put by twenty pounds in the savings' bank!"

The candle gave a bright light, the bread and jam looked uncommonly tempting, and Patrice gradually imbibed Brigitte's cheerfulness. He moved to the table, and, sitting down, quietly munched away, quite recovering his spirits by the time the last slice was consumed.

CHAPTER XII.

BRIGITTE LAYS OUT HER MONEY.

COMING home, poor Brigitte thought, was not a pleasant thing. She then realized, for the first time, in its full bitterness, the fact of her unwelcomeness in her uncle's house. Outwardly the orphans were treated exactly like the children of the house—that is to say, they were fed with as liberal a hand, they slept on beds as soft, they were clothed as warmly. But do we not all know that there are two ways of doing kindly or even just things, and that the one hits us like a blow, the other caresses us like a benediction?

Emilia, whilst intending to do her duty by these orphan children, always acted with the consciousness that her husband's eyes were upon her. She determined that, as far as food, shelter, and clothing went, Bryan should never say she was a sparing-handed step-mother. In fact, rather than incur such a suspicion, she went to the other extreme, doling out the largest portion of the Sunday cake, or the half-holiday jam-pot, to the intruders.

All this was done, not with a vain-glorious air—Emilia was not the person to pride herself upon anything she did—but with the look of a martyr. Childhood is callous—childhood is careless. The boys thought Aunt Emmie kind enough when she did not scold; only Brigitte detected the lack of love, the gracelessness, the reluctance, underlying all these outwardly maternal acts.

Had Brigitte analysed her feelings, she would have come to the conclusion that her want of tenderness and sympathy for Aunt Emmie almost amounted to dislike. But Brigitte never thought of doing this. She was old enough to understand how matters stood, and as long as Aunt Emmie allowed her to remain with Hilaire, she felt grateful, if not affectionate. And Aunt Emmie was never unkind to Hilaire. The clinging little thing, with his fair curls and delicate, sensitive features, who loved everyone, and possessed the beautiful gift of being happy always, had exacted her tenderness as his right from the first, and she would even scold the little girls if they were rough or unkind to him. Hilaire was not infrequently indeed a bone of contention, for Emilia, under the pressure of increasing anxieties, was getting into a habit of perpetual irritability, and Kathleen and

her sisters would often wonder what made mamma so cross.

There were many reasons why the little sum Emilia was constantly doing mentally —namely, four and three make seven!— should appear so serious to her. In the first place, husband and wife could not agree as to the best mode of dealing with their difficulties. Emilia, strictly practical, limited her remedies to the strict necessities of the case. She thought it monstrous and unreasonable that Bryan should sentimentalize over the matter, and set himself to do, not only what he *must*, but what he *could*, for his brother's orphans. Why not apprentice Patrice at once to some respectable tradesman, let Brigitte go to the Stoke Newington school, and thus lighten their burden effectively, and at once? Helwyse had offered to provide for Ambroise, which was only fair and

right; but of course, if Helwyse were to marry, or travel abroad, or do anything else unexpected, the boy would have to come back to them. On the other hand, she urged, if Bryan foolishly refused to do any of these things—if he persisted in striving after impossibilities, and in acting without any reference to realities—it was of no use to deny the fact—ruin stared them in the face.

"Well," Bryan said coolly, after listening one evening to such a tirade—alas! he had heard it many a time before—"the ruin, my dear, will be that of your choosing, not mine. I have reckoned up the cost of school bills and the children's keep as well as you. If you do as I advise you, we shall send Mary Ann away, take Kathie and Margie from school, move into that cheaper house we saw last week at Holloway, and then be no worse off than we

were before. We pay fifteen pounds a year for the two little girls' schooling; Mary Ann costs us, I am sure, thirty more, and by moving to Holloway we shall get a house for one-third less than this. After three or four years, the elder boys will be off our hands, Brigitte will be able to earn something, and there will still be plenty of time to think of schools for Kathie and Margie."

"You are the first person I ever heard of who preferred the interests of other people's children to his own," Emilia said, also cold and bitter.

"My dear Emmie, listen to reason. If Patrice gets no education now, he will have to serve behind a counter all the days of his life—nay, I don't know if he is quite scholar enough for that yet. If, on the contrary, we put him into the way of earning his living like a gentleman, he would

not only be in a decent position, but able to help the others by-and-by. You don't know what it is, that serving behind the counter."

"He wishes to go to sea," Emilia said. "Why not let him follow his inclinations? You don't seem to realize, Bryan, what a burden the children are upon us. I could not pay the baker last week. It was quite impossible; and unless you can allow me more for the weekly bills, they must go. We must do as other people do, and run into debt."

"Send the nursegirl away, and take the little ones from school. Let Brigitte mind them."

"How inconsistent you are, Bryan! Is it not for Brigitte's good that she should go to that Stoke Newington school at Christmas? Mrs. Skimp is still willing to have her, and would train her for a gover-

ness. As to Mary Ann, how is one servant possibly to do the work for nine people? We should be worse than slave-drivers."

"But why not take Kathie and Margie from school till Hilaire is a little older, and Brigitte might leave him? They learn very little as yet. Brigitte, I am sure, could teach them as much, and fifteen pounds is fifteen pounds."

"Oh! Bryan, it would break their hearts. They are so happy at Miss Leeson's. It is such a blessing, too, to get rid of them all day long. I have enough to worry me without that, I am sure."

"Then I will go and give notice to quit this house at Christmas, and hire the other one," Bryan answered, desperately, and taking up his hat. "That would be a saving of as much. We must save somewhere. I would give you more money for the weekly bills if I had got it. I have

not got it, and can't get it. We must do with what we have. I have walked into the City every day this week to save three shillings in omnibuses. I am always thinking of what I can save in little things—of what use if you will not help me?"

"I am sure I try to save too," Emilia said, ready to cry. "I don't know what we are to do. It is not myself I care a straw about, but the children. I am dreadfully afraid of those cheap houses at Holloway. I think they cannot be healthy, being let at such a rent. We might all get typhoid fever! At any rate, let us think about it."

"It will be of little use to think of all these things when it is too late. If ruin stares us in the face, at least you cannot say I have not warned you," Bryan rejoined, and worried, angry, hurt, and aggrieved, he put on his hat, not to go to his landlord and give him notice to quit,

but to take one of those moody rambles which were now his only consolation.

Poor Bryan and poor Emilia! To the careless outside world it might seem as if they were making mountains of molehills, and the sum perpetually recurring to their minds, as a problem, a riddle, and a maze —four and three make seven!—was nothing so very terrible, after all. But fathers and mothers who have had much such experience, will know better, and that to feed eleven mouths with what had before fed seven is no easy matter. Of course had they grappled with the difficulty together, bringing combined self-sacrifice, good sense, and resolution to bear upon it, the question would have received a speedy and hopeful solution. As it was, each felt the other to be wrong, and neither would give way. Bryan accused Emilia of wanting in generosity towards his brother's children; Emilia found him

wanting in fatherly duty to his own. Bryan was determined to bring up Brigitte and her brothers like Kathleen and her sisters. Emilia felt it no injustice, but rather a decree of nature, that the orphans should suffer for their father's fault. Bryan found Emilia lacking in foresight and large-heartedness; Emilia thought Bryan wholly unpractical and Quixotic. Thus the two were separated rather than brought together by this supreme trial of their lives, and were every day with their own hands broadening the tiny rivulet that had begun to divide them. They were drifting farther and farther from each other's sympathies, farther and farther from each other's comprehension. Mistrust quickly leads to misunderstanding, and when two people, bound together by the closest ties, once leave off explaining and justifying themselves in each other's eyes, it is easy to

see what will follow. Both obstinately pursue the line of conduct they have laid down —obstinately, ungraciously, and alone.

Dreary indeed were those autumn days, both without and within. Helwyse was away, her work still keeping her at Beechholme Park, so that her bright presence no longer occasionally broke the dull round of daily cares. Even good, friendly Mr. Starffe caught cold, and was perpetually coughing and melancholy. The brief spell of fine autumn weather had gone, leaving mists, and clinging clouds, and persistent drizzle behind. If a clear, sunshiny day came, Brigitte was out with Hilaire, who, childlike, did not appreciate the difference between this murky London climate, and the blue skies and bright winter of his native France. Happy childhood! that forgets everything, not only kindness and unkindness, but also the flowery scenes and

gracious surroundings through which it passes in a dream! Only Brigitte pined secretly for the abundant sunshine and transparent atmosphere of Dauphiné. Only Brigitte, when pondering and alone, unconsciously repeated to herself the burden of Mignon's song. Only Brigitte had buried her heart in her childhood's home. But the girl resolutely tried to make the best of things, and never once drew Hilaire's attention to the fogginess and dreariness of a London autumn. When the weather brightened, she took him for long walks to Muswell Hill, where they picked up the ripe horse-chestnuts he so loved to play with; or they lingered on Mount Pleasant, to count the trains as they scoured by; or they climbed to the top of Highgate Hill, and standing on the bridge, gazed wonderingly at that awful mysterious London, of which as yet they knew nothing.

The hanging woods were bereft of the glory that had enchanted them in Surrey; there was no lustre on the green valley of Old Hornsey, no colour or joy in the once smiling landscapes of Tottenham and Wood Green. The damp, clinging atmosphere, like a sponge, had sucked all the brightness out of the scene, leaving it cold, grey, watery. But so long as Hilaire could trot by Brigitte's side, holding her hand, and pouring out childish confidences, he was well content. The two would never tire of talking about Beechholme Park when they were alone, recalling the smallest circumstance with ever fresh delight. "We did this, we did that at dear Mrs. Cornwell's. When I am grown up I will send her a beautiful gown," Hilaire would say, whilst Brigitte, in her turn, would wish herself rich again and again, so as to be able to send a New Year's present to Pa-

pillon. When the walk was over, and the three little girls had come home from school, Brigitte would tell them stories over the fire, Hilaire sitting on her knee, the others gathered round.

"Brigitte is certainly handy with the children," Emilia thought, but she nevertheless hoped she would be induced to go to the Stoke Newington school at Christmas.

For Brigitte the worst part of the day was supper time, when all the children were in bed, and Uncle Bryan had come home. Sometimes the meal would be eaten in dreary silence, Uncle Bryan reading the paper, Aunt Emmie never raising her eyes from her plate; at others they would attempt to talk, invariably stumbling upon a thorny subject, sure also to end in silence. Bryan always refused to discuss domestic matters before Brigitte, and if Emilia unwarily mentioned the baker's bill, or the

high price of meat, he abruptly, even roughly, changed the subject.

"We will live on bread and water," he said one day angrily, "only do not let the poor children feel that we grudge them their portion."

"But when are we to talk of these things if not at supper-time?" Emilia responded, in her turn angry. "I must tell you what our expenses amount to. If I am not to consult you about this, whom else?"

"We will have a little talk on Sunday," Bryan said, in a beseeching tone. "I have walked all the way from the City, I am dead tired. You must know that I want a little rest now."

"I am sure Sunday is not a day to devote to worldly things, but as you please," rejoined the wife; and thus, for the hundredth time, an attempt at explanation left

matters worse than they were before. In former days, as soon as the supper-tray was removed, Bryan would bring out a volume of poetry or fiction, Cowper or Wordsworth, Thackeray or Charlotte Brontë; and whilst the wife stitched away at some useful juvenile garment, the husband would read aloud, not only with expression, but with considerable dramatic power, for Bryan had a gift of this kind. Or he would bring out his own modest little poems, and read them to his indulgent critic, pencilling corrections as he went along. Such bright hours of recreation was over, and the city clerk's spare moments, before looked forward to so eagerly, were now the longest and dreariest of the week.

So November came, to thoughtful housewives the most anxious of the year;

when the clothes-chest, and the coal-cellar, and the blanket-closet have to be inspected carefully, with many a sigh for the cold, dark, pinching months to come. There was no help for it! The orphans were shivering in their slight garments, Hilaire looked blue with cold, so Bryan desperately ordered warm clothes for all four, trusting to Providence to pay the bill.

Still there were things wanted that even a father of seven cannot think of, and when Emilia got out a store of warm flannel nightgowns for the little girls, she did it with the apologetic thought—"They are here, so the children may as well wear them, but, of course, if it came to buying, Kathleen and the rest would have to go without as well as Hilaire."

It happened to be a bitter cold day when Aunt Emmie came down with her arm full

of little flannel nightgowns, thinking this thought, whilst she said to Brigitte, carelessly—

"Just help me to mend and put on buttons, Brigitte. I am sure it is a mistake to wrap children up so much, but when once begun, you must go on with it."

Brigitte did not utter a word, but sat down to her task with a wistful face. The room in which Hilaire slept was a very cold one, looking due north. He had caught a slight cold on the first foggy day, and coughed at night. Oh, what would she have given for one of those snug little garments in which to wrap her darling! How could she say anything? How could she hint at another want, when so many had been generously supplied? She could only try, as she had tried again and again, to hit on a scheme for earning a little money.

The delightful little plan of the school had been rudely nipped by Aunt Emmie in the bud.

"No, Brigitte," she said, decidedly, "I won't have it, so divest your mind of the idea as quickly as possible. A school, indeed! Why, you could only teach infants, and a pretty noise and dirt and upset it would make, having a dozen children paddling in and out all weathers! If you really wish, as you say, to do something for yourself, and relieve your uncle and me of expense, there is a much better way, as you know. Go to Stoke Newington. You would get ten pounds the first year, and twenty the next, if you did well. Think of that."

Brigitte did think of it, but to leave Hilaire now seemed more than ever impossible. The rude English climate was try-

ing the little fellow sadly; and but for her vigilance he would most certainly have fallen an early victim to it. Never shepherd dog guarded his master's property more assiduously than Brigitte watched over her pet. If a gleam of sunshine broke the prevailing gloom, he was at once taken out of doors. If a breath of east wind was blowing, he was kept by the fireside. No little heir to a mighty kingdom had tenderer care, and his tiniest ailments were warded off by that best of all medicines: never-ceasing watchfulness and love.

One day Aunt Emmie handed Brigitte half-a-sovereign, and twopence in coppers, saying—

"Here, Brigitte, put on your hat and cloak, and go to the High Street, Islington, to buy yourself a hat. Uncle Bryan says he cannot go to church with you any more in that scarecrow, and you are quite old

enough to be entrusted with making little purchases for yourself. If you can get the hat for less than half-a-sovereign, you can buy yourself a pair of woollen mittens, or something useful, and here is twopence for the omnibus. Pray take care of your money, and lay it out to the very best advantage."

Poor Brigitte set out delightedly. It was not that she cared so very much about having a new hat, coquetry at present being sadly undeveloped in the prematurely matronly young girl. She was charmed with such a proof of Aunt Emmie's confidence in her, and as she hastened to reach the omnibus stand, thought of nothing but the best manner of deserving it. She made up her mind that never half-sovereign in the world should be laid out so judiciously as this most precious one. But ten whole

shillings for a hat was not to be thought of! Surely the half would more than suffice, and not only mittens for herself, but flannel nightgowns for Hilaire might surely be obtained for so large, so unparalleled a sum! The flannel nightgowns were, in fact, on Brigitte's brain, and when she found herself in that Vanity Fair of unaristocratic London, the High Street, Islington, she had neither eyes nor perception for anything else but the piles of flannel placed so temptingly in the doorway of every draper's shop. No matter how gay and pretty was the millinery displayed to tempt Islington coquettes, no matter how insinuatingly cheap were the prices of fascinating little hat or bonnet, Brigitte glanced carelessly at all and almost reached the "Angel" with her half-sovereign intact in her glove.

But she must really spend it, and as she stood before a large shop on the Green, literally crammed with Welsh and Saxony flannel, she could no longer contain herself. The irresistible temptation to enter a gin palace could not more completely possess a tippler than Brigitte's longing to make little Hilaire warm and snug these chill nights. "Aunt Emmie cannot be angry," she said to herself at last, "and I will buy new trimming for the old hat, and a brown veil to cover the crown on bright days. I *must* have the flannel."

So she plunged into the midst of the fleecy piles, to her young mind the most lovely objects in that magnificent display, and, it is hardly necessary to add, came out with the smaller half of the precious gold piece. But hardly had she gone a hundred yards when a second temptation,

hardly less overwhelming than the first, took possession of her.

This time it was a chemist's shop, and no more than gay ribbons, flowers, and feathers had intoxicated the girl's fancy just before, did the various little luxuries arranged with so much taste in Mr. Essence's window, arrest her attention now. She did not indeed see the bright-coloured glass scent-bottles, the ivory-handled hair-brushes, the elegant little mirrors, and other dainty trifles therein displayed, her quick, eager glance having been at once attracted to a good-sized green bottle, bearing the unenticing inscription—*Pure Cod-liver Oil.*

"Oh!" thought poor Brigitte, "I must have that bottle of cod-liver oil for Hilaire. He looks just as pale and thin as he did this time last year, when Dr. Tisane said—

'Mind and give him cod-liver oil whenever he looks like that.'" And again she repeated to herself—"Aunt Emmie cannot be angry with me, for I will buy hat-trimmings, and a veil to cover the shabby parts on bright days."

A second time the temptation was stronger than that of absinthe, opium, or gin to the inveterate self-poisoner, and she plunged in, issuing flushed and triumphant with the bottle of cod-liver oil hugged to her heart, as if it had been a case of jewels.

Alas! she looked a little crestfallen when, at last, the purchase of the trimmings had to be made out of the poor little remains of the half-sovereign. The price of the ribbon selected was of the very cheapest, the texture of the veil, to hide all defects when the sun shone, of the very thickest,

the result, looked at perspectively, far from encouraging. But Brigitte comforted herself with the thought that even if Aunt Emmie were a little angry, she must forgive her for Hilaire's sake.

Emilia was sitting at the window when Brigitte rang the front bell, and the first glance at her parcel told her all was not as it should be. She rose to open the door with heightened colour and an indignant voice.

"Really, Brigitte, I will never trust you with a penny again. What in the world have you got in those big parcels? And a bottle above all things! I suppose you have been buying scent for your handkerchiefs, or wash for your hair——"

"Dear Aunt Emmie, pray do not be angry," Brigitte said, feeling at that moment the guiltiest creature under the sun.

"I have got new trimming for the old hat, and with a gauze veil that will hide all imperfections, I assure you, it will do quite well. But Hilaire is so cold at night, and I am sure he will catch fewer colds when he wears flannel nightgowns. And it isn't scent or hair-wash in the bottle, aunty," the girl added, ready to cry. "It is only cod-liver oil for Hilaire. He always takes it in winter time, and I wouldn't mention it before, because I knew it was an expense —pray do not be angry."

"You should have told me that you intended buying these things. Of course we would get whatever is really necessary for Hilaire, that is to say, if we could afford it. The money was intended for a Sunday hat, and a Sunday hat you were bound to buy. But it is a lesson to me to do my own shopping for the future."

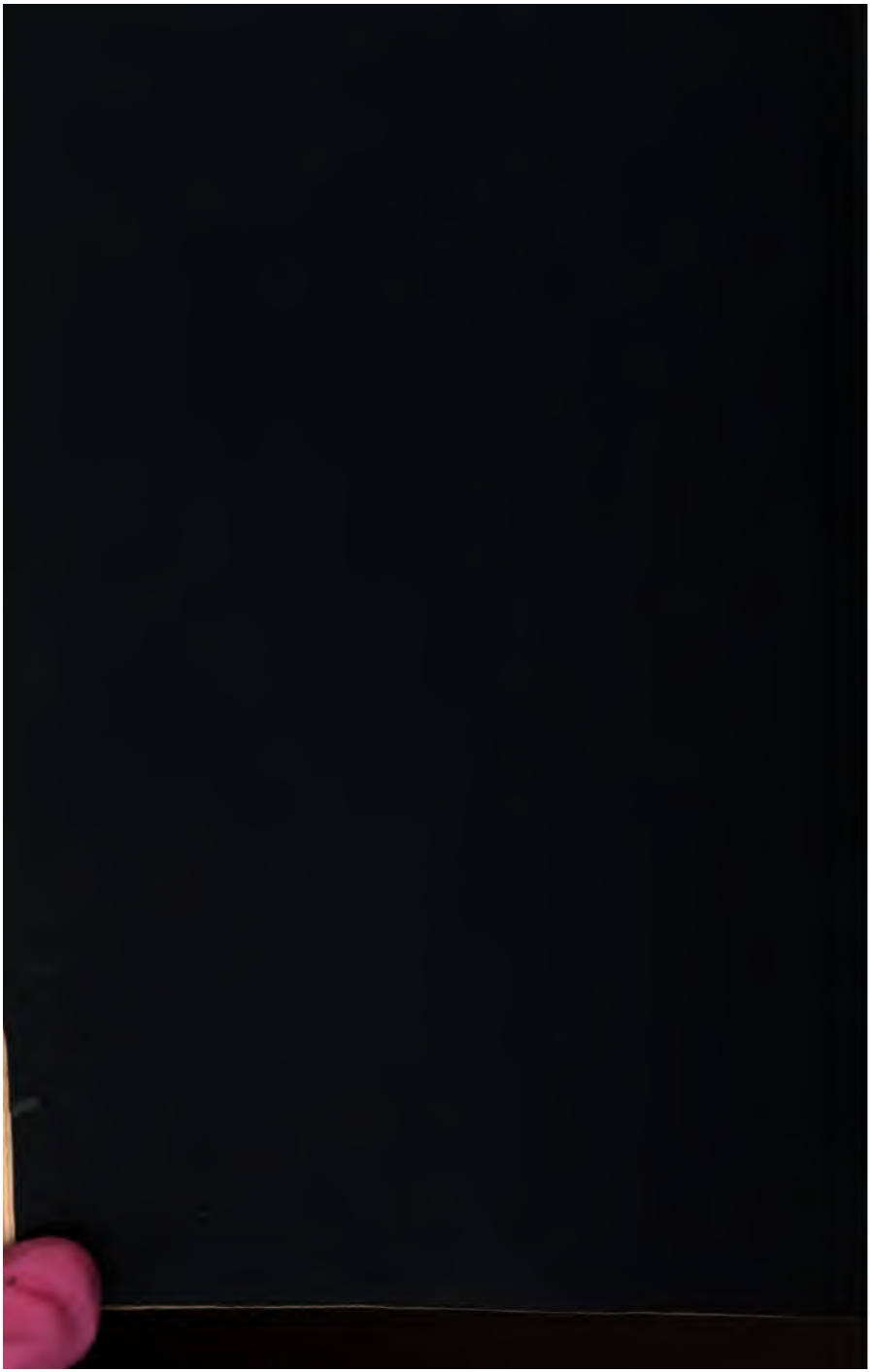
That was all, and when Brigitte had carried her parcels upstairs, no further allusion was made to the transaction. Still Aunt Emmie never offered to help her with the nightgowns or the hat, sent her on no more errands of the same kind, and insisted upon her staying from church on bright days. The girl felt that she was misunderstood, misrepresented, and, what was worse still, punished for doing her duty. Was not her duty to Hilaire to be considered before every other? She could not persuade herself that it was wrong to go without finery in order that he should be kept warm and in good health.

The little household, one and all, looked forward to Helwyse's return. Helwyse would take Ambroise away, in poor Emilia's eyes an enormous relief. Helwyse would

brighten the monotony of this daily tread-mill, thought Bryan. Helwyse would relieve the prevailing gloom in many ways. Why was Helwyse so long away?

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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